IMAGINING MOUNT ATHOS

Visions of a Holy Place from Homer to World War II

Veronica della Dora

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To the beloved memory of my mentor,

Denis Cosgrove

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FOREWORD

Imagining Mount Athos is a fabulous book in both senses of the word. Veronica della Dora's vivid, multilayered story is peopled by a stunning cast—monks and mountaineers, mystics and mapmakers, saints and sinners, aesthetes and invalids, botanists and archaeologists, pilgrims and imperialists. It is also fabulous in being incredible, a set of fables about a bizarre locale and its uncanny denizens, a stage set that seems a figment of fevered imagination. For almost two thousand years, Mount Athos has haunted the visions of votaries, featured the travails of travelers, fed the lusts of sacred megalomaniacs and secular autocrats, entranced poets and painters, lent scholars revelatory insights and dangerous delusions.

With verve and imagery that recall Marco Polo's tales in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities,* della Dora traverses the Athos envisaged by seekers after sanctity, security, practical knowledge, territorial and strategic power, philosophers' stones, and pharmacists' nostrums. Successive chapters cast Athos as mythical, utopian, iconic, erudite, geopolitical, and scientific. Captivating illustrations show Athos as sequestered island, as godlike giant, as geological strata, as botanical cornucopia, as epitome of picturesque perfection. No dreamt-of Eden or Atlantis, no City of Gold, no Oz or Ophir has the rich particularity, the charismatic magnetism of actual Athos, its images and mementos broadcast throughout the world in portolan charts and sacred maps, in early collectors' cabinets of curiosities, in far-flung chapels and churches, in museums, and on the mantels of accredited and armchair travelers alike.

This garden of the Mother of God, this door to heaven, the only major Byzantine monastic center of the Aegean world to survive Turks, Crusaders, and Slavs practically untouched, has attracted fantasists like moths to a flame. Hermitic retreat of the tenth-century Saint Athanasius, founder of Athos's

Great Lavra Monastery, the peninsula figures in Andronicus Palaeologus II's chrysobull of 1312 as "a second paradise, a starry sky, and the abode of all virtues." Here the Victorian British surveyor William Martin Leake imagined digging Xerxes' abortive ancient canal so as to island Athos from mainland Greece. Here the Macedonian architect Dinocrates projected a nonpareil city to glorify his patron, Alexander the Great, an Athos myth echoed almost two millennia later in the symbolism of Pope Alexander VII's imperial Rome, and in the modern Greek American sculptor Anastasios Papadopoulos's proposed colossal likeness of Alexander. Site of the quest of the nineteenth-century Russian collector Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastianov for the origins of Orthodoxy, Athos served as the setting for George Sylvester Viereck and Paul Aldridge's psychoanalytic science-fictional 1929 *My First Two Thousand Years: The Autobiography of the Wandering Jew.*

Armed with the 1701 pilgrim's travel guide by the physician-astrologist Ioannes Komnenos, we encounter the fifteenth-century Florentine monk and antiquarian explorer Cristoforo Buondelmonti; the philosopher Raphael Hythloday, immortalized in More's *Utopia;* the Venetian cosmographer Vincenzo Maria Coronelli and the engraver Alessandro della Via; classical connoisseur and French ambassador to Constantinople the Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier; the bibliomaniac Robert Curzon and the poet-painter Edward Lear; the art historian Robert Byron and the botanists John Sibthorp and August Grisebach; the Greek American sociologist Michael Choukas, who studied Athos masked for anonymity; the Nazi Byzantinist Franz Dölger, whose ethnographic forays never flushed out the Allied escapees for whom Athos was a god-sent gateway to freedom.

Most astoundingly, this lavish feast comes from a chef who has never set foot on Athos, forbidden to all women and females of most species but cats, which are superabundant in every monastery. Yet della Dora's intense familiarity with Athos suffuses every page. From accounts by scores of visitors, some resident for decades, others for only days, she weaves a skein that depicts Athos as if part of herself, while yet an utterly foreign realm. Her consummate success stems from an extraordinary empathy not only with Athos's permanent and transitory occupants, but also with those who, like herself, have seen Athos only from afar or have glimpsed it only in the mind's eye.

The scholarly armament della Dora brings to bear is as impressive as her book is engaging. Italian-born and schooled as well in America, she is at home in Greek and the tongues of her main protagonists. Geographer by profession,

she is proficient alike in theology and the history of cartography. Her erudition is deployed here with seemingly effortless skill, a modesty surpassing *sprezzatura.*

As another geographer, who half a century ago recommended conjoining experience with imagination, I salute *Imagining Mount Athos* for adding to these impassioned faith—faith in the pursuit of virtue, of transcendence, and even of folly. As made manifest in this marvelous book, faithful devotion shaped Athos from the start and sustains it to this day.

David Lowenthal

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Writing about Mount Athos without ever having been to Mount Athos requires faith. It has also required the help and patience of many. From this book's initial conception as dissertation proposal to the final manuscript, I have accumulated immense debts of gratitude to several institutions and individuals within and outside academia. The first and most consistent stimulus to this book comes from the fathers of Docheiariou Monastery on Mount Athos. Not only have they provided me with invaluable insights and precious sources I would have otherwise never been able to access, but they have also constantly supported me with their words and with their prayer. I would like to thank in particular Fr. Amphilochios and Fr. Theoktistos for their assistance with historical materials and with Byzantine Greek, and Fr. Apolló for getting me acquainted with the interior of the peninsula and its monasteries through the lens of his camera and of his accounts. It is thanks to the fathers of Docheiariou, to their living example of faith and true Christian love that from a forbidden landscape, Mount Athos has become one of the most significant places in my spiritual life—and the subject of this book.

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Parts of this book have been presented at various conferences, symposia, and seminars in the United States and in Europe and have appeared in shorter and altered form elsewhere: "Alexander the Great's Mountain," *Geographical Review* 95 (2005): 489–516; "Mapping Science and Myth on the Holy Mountain: Renaissance and Enlightenment Visions of Mount Athos," *Portolan* 62 (2005): 10–29; "Byzantine Mount Athos as an Edenic *Hortus Conclusus*, in *Journeys through European Landscapes/Voyages dans les paysages d'Europe,* ed. M. Léveque, M. R. del Arbol et al. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Biblioteca de Ciencias, Fundación Las Médulas, 2006), 167–70; "Geo-strategy and the Persistence of Antiquity: Surveying Mythical Hydrographies in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1798–1869," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 514–41; "Mythological Landscape and Landscape of Myth: Circulating Visions of Pre-Christian Athos," in *Symbolic Landscapes,* ed. G. Backhaus and J. Murungi (New York: Springer, 2008), 109–31; "Domesticating High Places: Mount Athos: Botanical Garden of the Virgin," in *High Places: Cultural Geographies of Mountains, Ice, and Science,* ed. D. Cosgrove and V. della Dora (London: IB Tauris, 2008), 105–25; "Gazes from the Sea: Mount Athos, Women, and the Geographical Imagination, 1880–1980," *Friends of Mount Athos Annual Report (2008)*: 49–60; "Mapping a Holy Quasi-Island: Mount Athos on Early Renaissance *Isolarii, Imago Mundi* 60 (2008): 139–65.

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IMAGINING MOUNT ATHOS

INTRODUCTION

This book is about a place and its meaning. It is about a mountain and how it became a most prominent landmark in the Western geographical imagination. It is also about a peninsula: one of the most strictly regulated spaces in the Mediterranean, and how it became a place transcending its physical boundaries. This place is Mount Athos, or the Holy Mountain of Christian Orthodoxy.

From above, Mount Athos is a 36-mile finger of land—the easternmost of the Chalkidikē Peninsula in the northern Aegean. From the sea, it is a majestic 6,670-foot-high pyramid, visible for more than 100 miles. This mountain-peninsula has uninterruptedly been a self-regulated monastic community for more than a thousand years. Christian hermits first colonized it in the ninth century. Soon Athos became a prominent node within a network of Byzantine holy mountains, including Olympus of Mysia, Kyminas, Latros, Galesion, and other famous peaks in Asia Minor. These mountains operated as centers of spiritual resource, pilgrimage, and endowment between the fifth and the eleventh centuries. They were initially attributed an aura of holiness because of the presence of charismatic ascetics and saints (who had been attracted by the isolation and wilderness of the environment), and later because of the establishment of organized monastic communities. Mount Athos was the first Byzantine holy mountain to be established in Greece. It was also the most isolated

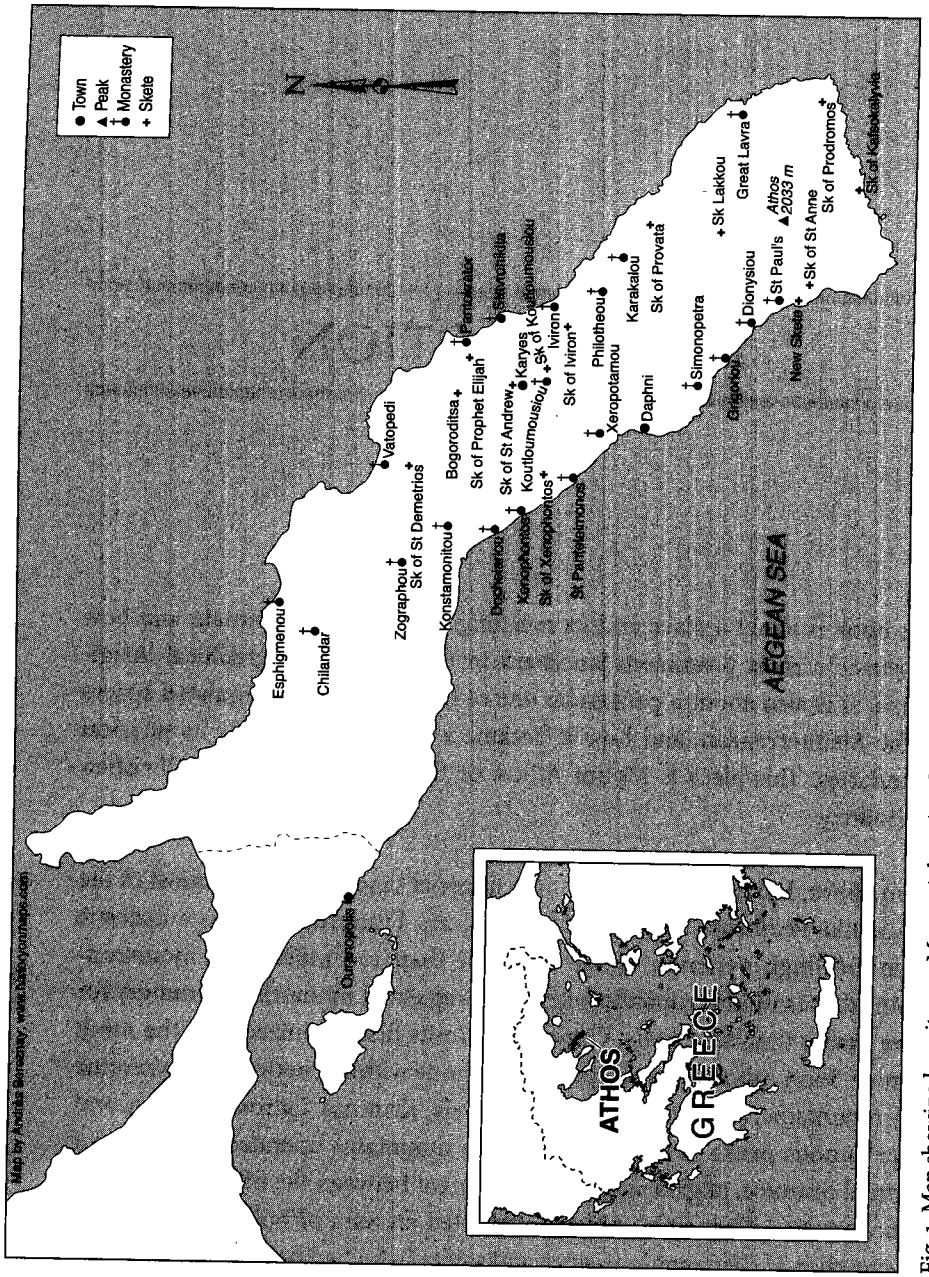


Fig. 1. Map showing key sites on Mount Athos. (András Bereznay, www.historyonmaps.com)

and the hardest to reach of all the holy peaks. Described as the holy mountain par excellence since the mid-tenth century, Athos is the only Byzantine holy mountain to have experienced uninterrupted occupation to the present day. Today, 1,800 male Orthodox Christian monks of different nationalities inhabit its hermitages and its twenty monasteries built over the centuries of the Byzantine Empire.[1]

Great landmarks, Jared Farmer notes, "are storied landmarks." Athos is not only the "mountain of the monks." It is one of the peaks mentioned most often in classical literature, from Homer on. According to Vitruvius, it was the mountain Dinocrates planned to carve into a colossal statue of Alexander the Great. Local legends identify it with the "exceedingly high" Mount of Temptation in the New Testament. For Second World War Allied refugees, Athos's pyramid loomed on the horizon as the last gateway to freedom in Nazi-occupied Greece. For pious pilgrims, it endures as a beacon of spirituality.[2]

The peninsula is also a site of garden stories. According to local tradition, on her way to Cyprus, the Mother of God was diverted to Athos by strong winds. Enchanted by the beauty of the place, she fell on her knees and asked her Son to grant her the land as personal domain. Mount Athos thus became "Her Garden." Byzantine authors described the peninsula as a *locus amoenus.* Western Renaissance cartographers depicted it as a Garden of Eden. Thomas More is said to have found in it a source of inspiration for his *Utopia.* Today, its inhabitants, the monks, perpetuate a gardening tradition more than a thousand years old, while botanists from all over the world continue to be attracted by its numerous endemic species.

Whether as a majestic peak or as an Edenic garden, Mount Athos has been one of the most narrated places in the Mediterranean. At the same time, however, it has been also one of the most strictly regulated. Its rugged coastline naturally sets it apart from the rest of the world for most of its perimeter. The land border, a five-mile wall, does the rest. As large multilingual signs dramatically remark, CROSSING THE BORDER IS ILLEGAL. VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED FULLY TO THE EXTENT OF THE LAW.

Athos is accessible only by ferry from the nearby village of Ouranoupoli. It resembles an island or a fenced garden. Male visitors need to be in possession of a special permit (*diamonētérion*), which is usually valid for no more than three days. Women, on the other hand, have not been admitted to the peninsula for more than one thousand years. This is not because the monks are misogynist—quite the opposite—but because they envisage the physical

presence of women on the peninsula as a possible distraction from their spiritual aspirations. Celibacy is one of the preconditions for monastic life, whose ultimate goal is the salvation of the soul through the mortification of passions. The ancient principle of the *ávaton* (literally a "no-go area") thus grants Orthodox brotherhoods and sisterhoods alike the right to shut their doors to the opposite sex if they wish to do so. A number of monasteries in Greece, Romania, and other Orthodox countries continue to honor this rule. In the case of Mount Athos, the principle is legally extended to the whole peninsula, "as if it were one [single] huge monastery." In spite of physical separation, the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy remains a meaningful presence in the lives of millions of faithful (both men and women) and a prominent cultural icon for a perhaps even larger number of nonfaithful.[3]

Mount Athos is one of those places of which most people have heard, but that few have visited. For monks and visitors, it is a physical place imbued with different meanings and performed through different practices. For most of those aware of its existence, however, it remains a landscape. For some, Mount Athos is a landscape they may have contemplated from the boat; for many, it is a landscape of myth they will never get to see, an evocative landmark in their geographical imagination, but it is also one to which many feel attached. How has it become such? Why do places like Mount Athos—places that few have actually visited, experienced, touched—become more significant than accessible destinations? Why do these seldom-visited places persist, while others fade into oblivion? In other words, how does a place become a "landscape of myth"? And how does a landscape become a place beyond physical experience?

Place is usually associated with a precise and meaningful physical locality and with direct personal experience. The *Dictionary of Human Geography* defines place as "a portion of space." Etymologically the word "place" derives from the Latin word *platea* and the Greek πλατεία, both indicating a "broad way," an open, but bounded space, or region (from which the Italian and French words for "square," *piazza* and *place*). Place is thus self-enclosed. It is usually bounded by our imagination. Sometimes these boundaries are completely artificial; some other times they overlap with those imposed by humans, or by nature—like Mount Athos's coastline.[4]

Place suggests proximity and intimacy, as well as rootedness and stability. Place is material; it is reassuring—like the rock of Mount Athos. Landscape, by contrast, is inherently and intensely visual. It refers to a portion of land

gazed upon from one spot. It sets the observer at a distance. It allows for aesthetic contemplation, for inner meditation. It stirs imagination and desire—like Mount Athos's dark silhouette looming on the horizon in the summer haze. As opposed to abstract geometrical space, place is implicitly local and saturated with meaning. Landscape, on the other hand, "works amidst and through [place and space]: presence/absence—tears things apart and even threads them together again. . . . [It] reintroduces perspective and contour."[5]

For the past ten centuries, Mount Athos has been the dwelling place of thousands of monks, but it has also been a site of rare cultural stratification gazed at and imagined by a variety of visitors and nonvisitors. On its rock, legends and narratives of all sorts seem to have been layered over time, as on an ancient palimpsest. From a poststructuralist perspective, it might be tempting to regard Athos as the "product" of different narratives, or external gazes: of the Orthodox faithful, of the Western classicist, of the botanist, or the wartime refugee, and so on. But Athos is more than that—just as nature is more than a social construction. It is a hybrid creation, a collaboration of geology with the imagination of humans, or what Robert Macfarlane would call a "mountain of the mind."[6]

There is something more immediately experiential, more than discursive about place that surpasses all the accumulation of meaning. Place precedes the mind. Place is more than a stage on which things happen. Human thought and experience, we are told by phenomenologists, are grounded in the concrete, in the corporeal, with the particularity and immediacy of the physical world. This is not to deny that specific places, like Mount Athos, are the products of culture and society. It is rather to claim that their material specificity "adds up to a lot more than that." The discourses that infuse Athos are carved in the rock, mingled with water, intertwined with vegetation. The meanings attached to the unique physical specificities of the peninsula make up its *genius loci* and enable its power to enter and persist in human imagination.[7]

Not all places function in the same way. Some places (like fairs and expos, for example) are inherently ephemeral. Some others (for example, built environments) may radically change. Others simply die away. Other places, however, persist through the eons, outliving the patronage of specific cultures. Mount Athos belongs to this last category.[8]

Large geographical features create their own world. They may contract or expand with the passing concerns of people, but they "never completely lose

their identity." Yi-Fu Tuan argues that "there is a deep-rooted belief in the permanence of mountains. And everlasting mountains do not evoke the pathos of time." Thanks to their permanence in the landscape and their insistent materiality, mountains have been subjected to a multilayered process of signification (as sacred, mythical, geopolitical, naturalistic objects). Some of them have become landmarks for orientation, icons in our mental maps.[9]

A lone pyramid emerging from the sea, Mount Athos exemplifies all these uses. Its cultural history is dependant on its visibility in the landscape and on its physical geography: "it is hard to imagine 'a Mount Athos' in a different geographical setting," the historical ecologist Oliver Rackham observes. It is unlikely that monasticism could have converted the nearby relatively flat and barren island of Lemnos into a Mount Athos. In the words of Graham Speake, "it is thanks to its geography that the flames of the holy beacon that is Mount Athos have continued to burn so brightly to this day."[10]

For centuries, Mount Athos has been narrated as a fragment of Byzantium, as a sort of timeless island. Unlike other Byzantine holy mountains, Athos survived Latin crusaders and almost five hundred years of Ottoman occupation (1423–1912)—in exchange for the payment of a regular fee, the Porte granted Athos its special status and did not interfere with internal affairs. In the twentieth century, the Holy Mountain survived two world conflicts and a terrible civil war. It also survived modern secularism—and it continues to do so.

In 1928, Robert Byron called Athos "the station where all years have stopped."[11] In the age of digital communications and high-speed transportations, Athos is still narrated as such. The use of the Julian calendar sets the Holy Mountain thirteen days behind the rest of the world. Life on the peninsula is regulated by Byzantine hours and monastic routine. Days start in prayer at 2:30 a.m. and end at sunset, always in prayer—as they have been doing for the past thousand years. Time on Athos is cyclical: it is the time of religious recurrences, of perpetual returns.

Islands, Adam Nicolson suggests, concentrate "the dreams of Arcadia with which civilization has always been haunted." They are places of legend and invention, of loss and recovery; places that "create the conditions in which to consider eternity." Perhaps this is why Athos has been commonly narrated as an island "out of this world," rather than as a peninsula attached to the mainland. While physically closed, its boundaries, however, have not been impermeable to the linear time of history, just as they are not impermeable to cell

phones and the Internet. Today nowhere is an island—even Mount Athos. But on Athos linear time follows a different pace. Changes do happen there too, just more slowly.[12]

To the Western eye, Athos seems to persist, like its rock. And persistence is what sets Mount Athos in motion. It is thanks to its visual prominence that classical authors turned Athos into a literary landmark, which was then appropriated by Italian Renaissance scholars, and revisited as an object of desire by nineteenth-century British travelers and surveyors. It was its "eternal" being in the landscape that made Athos a landscape of myth. But it was also its perception as an island of the past that attracted modern ecologists, sociologists, journalists, and artists alike. The Holy Mountain continued to travel through the complex circuits of Western culture also by means of their representations. It traveled as a landscape, as a vision.

Whether in prose or paint, on canvas or on digital photographs, on postcards or in poems, landscape representations are vehicles for the circulation of place through space and time. They take places out of their physical boundaries and move them around, shaping geographical imaginations. Unlike stones, seashells, dried flowers, and other tokens of place, landscape representations do not convey place in fragments, but in its visual totality. They miniaturize it; they make it legible to our eyes. They magnify its iconicity. They turn it into a harmonious picture. They aestheticize it. They change it. And they change, too, as they move around. This book considers changes in both literary and graphic landscape representations of Mount Athos.[13]

As a landscape of myth traveling through different contexts, Mount Athos changed form and meaning, as the following chapters show. As a place, it changed many human lives, including that of the author. Place suggests belonging, attachment. But, like landscape, "feelings of belonging can be both sited and mobile." They expand places; they move them around. My story of Mount Athos begins beyond its boundaries, with the story of another woman.[14]

Ferries to the Holy Mountain and guided boat trips along its western coast all leave from the village of Ouranoupoli, a few miles north of Athos's land boundary. They depart from a concrete pier backed by an ancient Byzantine tower. This tower and the surrounding land used to be part of Mount Athos. In 1922, the Greek government confiscated this portion of land for the benefit of the Greek Orthodox refugees who were fleeing Turkish persecution in Asia Minor.

The border of the monastic republic thus recessed from the isthmus of the peninsula to a few miles into the interior. The refugee village of Ouranoupoli was created out of nothing, and the tower, for centuries situated on a monastic farm, suddenly found itself outside Athos's holy precinct.

The tower that had been traditionally regarded as the first distinctively characteristic landmark one encountered on the holy peninsula, started to be looked at as "the last point to which a woman might go." Today it is open to the public. From time to time, it is used as a space for exhibitions. It has become the symbol of a village without ancient legends, and yet, almost ironically, it borders on one of the places most densely imbued with myths and legends in the whole Mediterranean. For villagers and developers, the tower is a solid presence conferring an aura of antiquity to a twentieth-century town, and thus legitimizing what Eric Hobsbawm called the "invention of tradition." For most tourists, Ouranoupoli's tower is a commodified space offering a great view of a place on which most of them will probably never set foot. For the oldest villagers and monks, however, this tower is also an uncanny space full of non-presences and ghosts.[15]

Between 1927 and the outbreak of World War II, and then from the end of the conflict until 1982, the tower was occupied by an Australian woman, Joice Nankivell, and her husband, Sidney Loch, a journalist and World War I veteran. Joice was a writer and a humanitarian volunteer. During the First World War, she worked in a Quaker camp in Poland. In 1922, she and her husband were sent to Greece to aid the Asia Minor refugees.[16]

Joice got first acquainted with the tower on a weekend excursion during her relief work in the huge refugee camp that had been set up on the grounds of the American Farm School in Thessalonica. The tower captured her gaze from the very first moment: "mystic, wonderful, gleaming blue-white in the full moonlight, or pink-stained white in the setting sun. A sentry on the land-frontier of the Holy Territory." For Joice, the tower's true charm lay in its geographical location on the threshold between two different worlds: on the one hand, secular Ouranoupoli, "a small new village, built on rock and sand for the refugees . . . A waterless village that could only hope for the Virgin to perform one of the miracles for which Athos was famous"; on the other, Holy Athos itself: "Byzantium still in all its glory, . . . a world of wondrous beauty that through long ages had beckoned and claimed solitaries and hermits."[17]

For the Australian woman, a mystic halo surrounded the Holy Mountain, a world repeatedly visited by her husband, but which she could contemplate only from outside:

> The charm of Athos lies deeper than in its exquisite setting; than in the grandeur of the mighty mountain shouldering into the sky; or the sea's thunderous waves; than in the fantastic buildings; the loneliness; the solitude; deeper than its long monastic tradition, for that was in actuality superimposed on a much older pagan tradition of "holiness." There is that spell which has made Athos what it is; that lured the ancient gods; that caused the little party of refugee monks to lean on their oars when they caught their first glimpse of Athos and to exclaim: "The Holy Mountain!" Those who fall under that spell cannot get away.[18]

Athos's *genius loci* extended well beyond the wall of stones hastily built up by the monks to mark the new boundary of their land. Once the couple had made the tower their new home, their relationship with Athos grew more and more intimate. As Sidney wrote, the promontory of Athos "continued beyond the wall for twenty-five miles until ending in the Holy Mountain, and touched village life more closely than the normal world which stretched for a hundred miles in the other direction to Salonika. As a centre which provided work, villagers disappeared [on Athos] for months on end. They turned up with cupboards and tables for their cottages from decayed Russian buildings, or smuggled sugar for their wives. A string of mules passed in and out at night with swarms in bee-skeps."[19]

In winter, Sidney disappeared beyond the wall for entire months. He searched for materials for his book on the Holy Mountain and deepened his knowledge of the peninsula. He plunged himself into the thick forest, or wandered through remote hermitages and ancient monasteries, gathering stories to write and circulate beyond the tower, through the complex circuits of Western culture. On the other side of the boundary, Joice's imagination restlessly worked through the majesty of a landscape glanced from the window of the tower's upper floors. The dark outline of the ridge became part of her daily life. Every morning she saw the sun rise over the dark foothills of Athos, streaking the world with shine and shadow. "The land smudged with the austere darkness of the olive groves, the wind lifting their leaves and ruffling them into freckles of sober grey and silver. The intense blue shine of the mountain intensifying as the light broadened, and the sea lying quietly under the dawn wind."[20]

The tower gradually became the stopping place for visitors to and from Athos. Every summer, British battleships anchored in front of the tower. "Sometimes their visits lasted three weeks," Joice recalled, "and the old tower

echoed with the laughter of their officers and men." Many European scholars conducting research on Athos sojourned in the tower: botanists from the Kew Gardens, university professors from Oxford, artists, fellow writers, etc.[21]

Monks and hermits also stopped by and fascinated Joice with stories of their monastic world—a world to which Joice did not have physical access, but of which she nevertheless felt part. They "rode into the village to buy or exchange. . . . Some of them called on us, and stayed an hour or two and had a meal, or spent the night, for Sidney made many friends on the Mountain. They talked of miracles and ancient lore; of wondrous healings; of salvation from great perils; of the power of different ikons."[22] The tower thus became a gathering point for storytelling. For foreign visitors, it became an antechamber to the Holy Mountain. For the monks, it was a threshold to the secular world.

During World War II, as Greece was being occupied by the Germans, Joice and Sidney flew to Romania and to the Middle East as agents for the Allies. They saved more than a thousand Jews and Poles from the death camps. Then the Germans withdrew, and the two returned to the tower.

> Yannis, who took care of the ruin for us, had the keys. Old, grimy rooms hastily whitewashed. . . . I remembered the kindly ghost who had always occupied the tower: how he climbed the stairs before the more important church holidays and went into the little chapel where he had served through a long life. His skull was there in a tiny alcove on the top balcony. . . . "Yannie, what are those holes?" "Bullet holes. Na, the place is full of them! There was scarcely an inch of ceiling without them. Victims were questioned here. A Greek officer was parachuted in. They shot round his head to frighten him. Those are two of the holes. He was killed afterwards."[23]

In 1954, Sidney suddenly died of heart attack. He had just completed the sixth chapter of his book on Athos. He was buried at the American Farm School of Thessalonica—the place where his and Joice's Greek adventure had started, before they moved to the tower. A huge piece of rock from the Holy Mountain was placed upon his grave. His name was carved on it.[24]

The tower suddenly became for Joice a place of solitude and painful memory. While Sidney was alive, the tower had been a place of love and laughter, swarming with people. Now Joice was alone. Her aging body found it increasingly hard to climb the steep wooden stairs of the tower. Her only consolation was to complete Sidney's book on Athos. She went through his notes written in

old diaries he used to carry with him in a rucksack on his solitary walks on the peninsula. Among the notes, she found letters bearing the crest of the double-headed eagle of the Byzantine Empire written to Sidney by the librarians of the monasteries. Here and there she noticed marks of candle wax on the yellowed paper. Joice felt close to her husband as she read and reread his notes. She heard his voice and walked with him on the Holy Mountain.[25]

In 1982, Joice passed away at the age of ninety-four. She was buried in the cemetery of Ouranoupoli, in the shadow of the Holy Mountain. "The tower, a grand pile of stones, still rose from the sea although shattered in many ways by the after-war violence in Greece" and by the departure of her lady.[26]

In August 2003, I visited the tower. Mine was a sort of pilgrimage. I had never met Joice, but I somehow felt akin to her. Mount Athos had become an important part of my life. I don't remember how and when I first heard about it. Instead, I do remember very well when I first gazed at it. I remember it as a landscape. It was during a boat excursion with a summer school, ten years earlier. I remember its dark silhouette looming on the horizon—it intimidated me, but it also stirred my imagination. I was not quite sure what to expect. A few years later, I entered into an intense correspondence with one of the peninsula's twenty monasteries. I found a spiritual father there. I turned to Orthodoxy. Mount Athos became a place.

As I write, like Joice, I feel bound to Athos by a special affective tie. But if, for Joice, Athos's boundaries encompassed Ouranoupoli, for me they stretched as far as Los Angeles. Seven thousand miles away, the Holy Mountain had been reaching me in different ways for years: through letters, photographs, books, and small icons; through a piece of blessed bread from the last main liturgical feast; through petals of the flowers decorating the Easter *epitáphion;* even through olives from the fathers' last harvest. Above all, it reached me through an invisible flow of prayers crossing the wall and its multilingual signs, crossing mountains and valleys, oceans and deserts—every single night. For me, an Italian convert to Orthodoxy studying in the United States, Athos was a presence perhaps even more alive than the place where I was living. It was one of the few stable landmarks in a life of continuous moves and changes. And, of course, I had never visited it. I had only gazed at it from a boat, 547 yards off the coast—and, like Joice, from the balcony of her venerable tower.[27]

Topophilia is "the affective bond between people and place."[28] It implies personal experience. But, like place itself, it comes at different scales and works

in different fashions. It is sited, but it can also be mobile. It can be long-distanced. Physical distancing from a place such as Athos does not necessarily mean exclusion, but rather potential participation through different and more sophisticated channels. Joice and I are not alone. A silent flow of prayers and donations, of material and spiritual exchanges between Athos's monks and physically distant women was already crossing the boundaries of the holy peninsula during the first centuries of its Byzantine history. "Several acts explicitly reveal women's strong yearning for spiritual links with the Holy Mountain which they could never visit." Estate properties and objects of art were often donated to Athonite monasteries in exchange for spiritual benefits. In AD 1142, for example, a certain Maria Tzousmenē wrote in her act of donation: "When I heard about the Holy Mountain, my soul thirsted for the living God . . . and I too wanted to be commemorated on the Holy Mountain." In AD 1046, another woman, Maria Lagoudē, while physically removed from the peninsula, envisaged the abbot of the Great Lavra Monastery as "her spiritual father, the Lavra as her mother, and herself as one of the brethren and children of the Lavra," a place she never saw—even from the boat.[29]

Imagining Mount Athos is a book written from beyond the boundaries of the Holy Mountain. It is not the story of Mount Athos, but of Mount Athos in the geographical imagination. It is about the ways in which this physical place has been narrated in the Orthodox and Western world and how it has become an icon circulating across space and time, reaching out through centuries to millions of people who, like me, have never visited it. At the same time, the book is also a rediscovery of narratives beyond those traditionally associated with the Holy Mountain (that is, the sacred and the Byzantine). Athos travels through different channels. Joice first approached it as a picturesque landscape. For me, it has become an intimate sacred place. Most monographs and tourist guides of the peninsula emphasize its ancient Byzantine history. But my Italian friends only know that Mount Athos is an exotic place somewhere in Greece where women can't go, whereas my advisor at UCLA knew about Athos via classical literature.

The book is conceived and structured accordingly. It uncovers and brings together a set of largely unexplored perspectives which I sense have been variously important in circulating Athos in popular imagination and making it the extraordinary place it is: the site of pre-Christian myths of Western Renaissance and Enlightenment scholarship; the utopian *locus amoenus* of Byzantine

literary descriptions and Renaissance island books; the beacon of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman-dominated world and nineteenth-century Russia; the exotic womanless "otherness" for nineteenth-century Orientalists and early-twentieth-century journalists; the shelter for Allied refugees during the Second World War, and a botanical and sociological laboratory for early-twentieth-century scientists.

Unlike traditional historical monographs, the chapters of this book do not follow a strict chronological pattern. They are arranged thematically along different narrative channels through which Athos has circulated outside of its physical boundaries. The chapter titles refer to broad associations between Athos and these narratives: mythical, utopian, iconic (or sacred), erudite, geopolitical, and scientific. Each chapter focuses on vignettes, key texts, and graphic representations illustrative (and constitutive) of these narratives.

Chapter 1, "Mythical Athos," examines the transformation of a physical landmark into a literary topos and moral emblem. One of the most narrated peaks by Ancient Greek authors and the site of at least five ancient cities, in the Roman Empire "mythical Athos" turned into an imaginary literary landscape, and during the Italian Renaissance into a powerful visual emblem. Focusing first on the interplay between Athos's physical geography and ancient mythologies, and then on graphic renderings of the colossus envisaged by Dinocrates, this chapter explores uses and reappropriations of Athos in different Western European contexts (from Roma Alexandrina to baroque Vienna and Revolutionary France). It looks at Athos as a landscape of myth alive in the fantasy of poets and artists who lacked any direct experience of the place.

Chapter 2, "Utopian Athos," explores the peninsula's garden story. It opens with the colonization of Athos by Christian hermits in the ninth century and the shifting perceptions of its environment throughout the Byzantine period. While the early founders of the monasteries engaged themselves in an ascetic struggle against harsh, untamed nature, their fourteenth-century successors, along with court scholars who may have never visited Athos, described the mountain-peninsula as a *locus amoenus*. They narrated Athos as true Eden hosting a perfect utopian community comparable to that described by Plato. These late Byzantine literary descriptions (or *ekphráseis*) found a graphic counterpart in Western cartography. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Athos figured on the maps of island books as a round insular shape, inspiring, some scholars argued, graphic representations of Thomas More's island of Utopia.

Chapter 3, "Iconic Athos," focuses on the subsequent transformation of Athos from sacred place into sacred icon. A nonbiblical mountain and yet the most venerated mountain in the Orthodox Christian world, Athos became a popular destination for pilgrimage only in the eighteenth century, at a time of economic and political distress in which the monks were forced to undertake long "promotional" alms-begging missions to the Danubian Principalities and Russia. Panoramic engravings of the peninsula helped the monks present Athos as a sacred landscape and as a symbol of Orthodoxy to their potential benefactors and prospective pilgrims. With the progressive collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Balkan nationalisms, Athos turned from pan-Orthodox icon into a powerful symbolic landscape open to "conquest." New graphic representations of the Holy Mountain accompanied the establishment of the first Romanian foundation. They also contributed to a massive influx of Russian monks and pilgrims. This chapter shows how Athos's transformation of place into sacred icon was directly dependent upon its ability to be represented and circulated.

Chapter 4, "Erudite Athos," revisits the mythical and sacred narratives presented in the previous chapters through the lens of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western visitors. It considers a range of different "erudite" practices through which Mount Athos was conceptually appropriated by these outsiders: from historical topography to manuscript hunting, from travel writing to landscape painting. British and French classicists, Orientalists, collectors, surveyors, and artists approached Athos as a landscape of desire that could be in turn circulated in the geographical imagination of an increasing number of educated Western Europeans. As Western eyes were getting used to the closed cartographic spaces of museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and world exhibitions, quasi-insular Athos presented its visitors with an extraordinary "natural" open-air archaeological and ethnographical museum, but also with a unique "collection" of sublime and picturesque sceneries—in other words, with an ideal space for self-display and representation. This chapter shows the powerful link between vision, desire, and possession at work through landscape.

On the wave of technological change, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the intercourse between Athos, Western visitors, and circulating representations dramatically intensified. Within a "closed globe" compressed by increasingly efficient communication and transportation systems, Mount Athos came to embody an exotic and yet near otherness, a fossilized fragment

of Byzantium that stood in stark contrast with modernity and the contemporary geopolitical scene. Located in one of the most politically explosive regions of the world, early-twentieth-century Athos spread in the Western imagination through the language of "naturalized geopolitics," a normalizing vision of world order and history that rested on biological metaphors and evolutionary theories. Chapter 5, "Geopolitical Athos," explores early-twentieth-century conceptualizations of Mount Athos as impacted by geopolitical events and the new language of modernity.

Chapter 6, "Scientific Athos," discusses Athos within different Western scientific traditions. Not only did these inform (and were informed by) fieldwork practices on the peninsula, but they also returned new territorial imaginations about the Holy Mountain to an academic and general public. Through Western scientific practices, the "Garden of the Mother of God" was turned into a large "natural" botanical garden. Probably one of the most attractive aspects of Athos was its panoptic conformation: its self-enclosed cartographic space emblematically topped by a majestic peak in which different microclimates and vegetational belts succeeded one after the other. In the first part of the twentieth century, sociologists discovered a human laboratory grouping an extraordinary range of categories of male individuals. Scientific Athos supported Bachelard's claim that "the cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it," and thus, we could add, "the better I narrate and circulate it."[30]

The intention of this book is to show the complex processes that lie behind place-making and landscape-making: in particular, the interplay between the physical geography of a mountain-peninsula and human imagination, and its transformation into a landscape of myth. In this journey to Athos, I also aim at showing how place can speak, through its changing representations, of broader knowledge-making processes and of cultural contexts that are often geographically separated from it—from classical Greece to Renaissance Italy, Victorian England, and Nazi Germany. Like Joice's tower, this book is conceived of as a point of encounter between different people and their stories—hopefully one that might, in its own way, contribute to appreciation and respect for Mount Athos as a unique cultural and spiritual landmark.

1

MYTHICAL ATHOS

If it is true that "objects anchor time," it might be argued that geographical objects, the most permanent of all, can crystallize myth. Not all of them, however, crystallize myth, or not to the same extent. Before assigning meaning to a natural object, Martin Warnke suggests, one "must first have been struck by its special qualities."[1]

As the most imposing and enduring physical features on earth, mountains are perhaps also the most obvious transcultural depositories of myths and legends. The ancient Greeks regarded them as primeval elements of Creation. Hesiod's *Theogony* (ca. 700 BC) lists mountains, together with the ocean, as the first things generated from the union between Heaven and Earth. From the time of Homer to that of Alexander the Great, mountains endured among the most significant landscape features because of their majestic grandeur, because of their almost insistent "thingness," but especially because of their immutability—unlike rivers or forests, mountains did not change. They just *stood* in their place.

The ancient Greeks associated mountains with divinities. Many sanctuaries from the Archaic and classical periods are famous for their spectacular cliffside or mountaintop settings. "There seems to have been an idea that the gods needed to live where they could gaze down upon the world." Apollo's gaze, the "view from above," set the gods aside from mankind, but not completely. From his elevated position, Apollo, the sun god, embodied "a desire for wholeness

and a will to power, a dream of transcendence" that encompassed heavens and earth. Like any Greek divinity, he was separated from men, and yet still in their world.[2]

Mountains in Greek epic poems formed a powerful physical link between human and divine realms. Belonging to the earth, but rising toward heaven, they were meeting places where the two basic elements came together. Famous god-inhabited mountains were usually sublime, awe-inspiring, transcendent. Their summits might have been broken by sharp, convoluted crags. They might have been mysterious, with their heights shrouded in a crown of clouds, which "now and again [parted] long enough to allow dazzling rays of sunlight to be reflected from the snow."[3]

Mountains in Greek antiquity, however, were not only evocative locations of sanctuaries, or awesome dwellings of divinities. They were also abodes of titanic myths. "Thessalian legends reverberate with the sound of the cataclysm as they recount how giants, attempting to scale the heights of heaven, piled rock on rock Ossa on Pelion." With its majestic pyramidal summit looming above the "wine dark" Aegean, Mount Athos seems to have been no exception. The ancients referred to the whole peninsula as Ἀκτή, whereas Ἄθως (also Ἄθων and Ἀθόως), a pre-Hellenic word, was used to indicate the peak. According to ancient mythology, Athos was the name of a Thracian giant who hurled that whole rocky mass at Poseidon in a dramatic clash between giants and gods. In another version of the same myth, Poseidon was said to be victorious, burying the rebellious giant under the great rock that still towers in the North Aegean.[4]

Strange as it might sound, the mountain of ascetic struggle and monastic humbleness entered the Western geographical imagination through the door of myth and human *vanitas,* as an arena for the most incredible challenges to nature and projections of power. The same mountain-peninsula was deemed to have been cut from the mainland through a canal by the Persian king Xerxes in 480 BC, and to have inspired, two centuries later, the megalomaniac visions of Dinocrates, who planned to carve it into a colossal statue of Alexander the Great. Unlike the Persian king, however, Alexander is said to have "rationally" refused the bold project on logistical grounds.[5]

The myths of ancient Greece are often characterized as "immortal" not merely because they have been appropriated and circulated in Western culture for centuries, or because they involve immortal divinities and semi-divinities, but because they speak of human nature. They speak of its "immortal" virtues

and weaknesses (for example, Alexander's wisdom vs. Xerxes' and Dinocrates' excesses). They often do so through nature, through mountains.[6]

In ancient Greek literature and art, where present, landscape and landscape features speak themselves for the human psyche, reflecting or anticipating moods, events, and even the nature of their inhabitants. Metaphors become part of the scenery, and sceneries become living metaphors. "The landscape especially makes the mythical element human, it guides it from a crystal-like isolation, from the limitation of the inter-human, as Greek art offers it, to breathing nature in which the human being becomes totally human—in fact: aware of its humanness." Landscapes of myth are not just mere "constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock," as Simon Schama argues. They are physical wood, water, and rock turned into myth. While the visual prominence of mountains, for example, strikes the human imagination, the hardness and permanence of rock as a material ensure the perpetuation of myth over the centuries. It is in the solidity of the elements that myths, moral teachings, and values are embodied and given life.[7]

Landscapes of myth are more mobile than any other landscape. Their representations travel from place to place and from generation to generation, changing their form and sometimes even the meanings originally attached to them. Landscapes of myth like Tempe, Delphi, Olympus, or Athos are far more alive in the geographical imagination than in phenomenological experience. They become circulating references, moral emblems, ideas. Moving from its eternal abode in the Aegean to Athens, Rome, and Mantua as a classical literary topos, or, several centuries later, even to Paris and the United States as a graphic image, mythical Athos has been exploited in very different contexts and often even for antithetical ends. No longer solid as rock, its majestic cone became as fluid as the waters that surround it.

Athos in Ancient Greece

A Landmark and a Beacon in the North Aegean

The landscape of Greece, Vincent Scully notes, "is defined by clearly formed mountains of moderate size, which bound definite areas of valley and plain. Though sometimes cut by deep gorges and concealing savage places in their depth, the mountains themselves are not horrendous in their actual size." Majestic peaks such as Olympus and Athos are exceptions in this harmonious

valley to mountain relationship. It was probably this anomalous contrast with the surrounding land that made their summits sites of awe, even dwellings of divinities. It was their stark visibility that made high mountains a ubiquitous feature in the greatest poems of antiquity. Ancient Greek authors employed them to identify places, acting as the most prominent landmarks of a region, or simply "for geographic description and color," as Williams suggests.[8]

In Homer's *Iliad* (eighth century BC), Mount Athos is Hera's intermediate stop on her way from Olympus to Lemnos, as she flies over "high Pieria" and the "Haemus Hills with Snows eternal crown'd." Five centuries later, the epic poet Nicandros exalted Athos's imposing majesty "rising under the stars," whereas geographer Heracleides from Crete exploited it as a landmark for orientation in his description of Pelion.[9]

In the third century BC, however, the fame of Athos's massive cone was by no means confined to the Aegean and Greece; it stretched to the most distant shores of the southern Mediterranean, and featured in the works of famous (and less famous) poets: from Callimachus of Cyrene to Theocritus from Syracuse and Apollonius Rhodius, the director of the renowned library of Alexandria. In his *Argonautics,* Apollonius described the remarkable phenomenon of Athos's evening shadow being cast on the island of Lemnos, which lies 34 miles away from the peak:

> But when the morn display'd her orient light,
> Tall Athos rose conspicuous to the sight;
> Which though from Lemnos far remov'd it lay,
> As far as ships can sail till noon of day,
> Yet the proud mountain high-exalted head,
> A gloom umbrageous o'er Myrna spread.[10]

And so, as Speake comments, "even the Argonauts, the most dauntless of all mythology's mariners, were gratified to catch sight of [Athos] as they struck out across the open sea towards the Hellespont."[11]

In the fragmented Mediterranean of antiquity, when the open sea was feared, *cabotage* (coastwise navigation) represented the main way of communication between what Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell name "microregions."[12] In particular, the surface of the Aegean was "so broken up by peninsulas and islands that a ship could not go farther than forty miles from the shore. Moreover, owing to the prevailing high relief of the land, it was always in sight of peak or range in the clear summer weather."[13]

For sailors, Mount Athos has traditionally represented the most prominent landmark in the North Aegean, as popular sea songs continue to testify. When visibility is good, it is possible to see its summit from a distance of approximately 103 to 106 miles, which is to say from Thessalonica to the mountainous complex of Rhodope, and from Pelion, the Sporades, Skyros, and the northeastern shores of Evia to the entrance of the Dardanelles and the western coasts of Lesvos. Along with the peak of Olympos in Cyprus, Mount Atabyris in Rhodes, Mount Ida in Crete, the high peak of Samothrace, or Macedonian Olympus itself, Mount Athos constituted a most important node in an extensive network of mountain landmarks. These bold reliefs served sailors as the necessary encouragement for their creeping navigation.[14]

It is thus not surprising that Athos captured the attention of ancient geographers. In his *Γεωγραφικὴ Ὑφήγησις* (second century AD), Ptolemy is the first to inform us about the length and width of the peninsula and to provide us with a detailed compilation of measurements of its main landmarks.[15] Mount Athos, we are told in the first book of the *Ὑφήγησις,* was employed by Ptolemy's colleague Marinus of Tyre (AD 70–130) as the starting point to map the surrounding locations.[16] Its absolute predominance as a landmark in the North Aegean was effectively translated to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ptolemaic maps (see fig. 2).[17]

In his description of the gulfs of the Aegean Sea, Strabo (ca. 64 BC–AD 24) referred to the "cape of Athos" as the landmark "which marks off the limit of the Singitic Gulf," and, like his predecessors, exalted the extraordinary height of the mountain. Athos, the geographer argued, is "breast-shaped, has a very sharp crest, and is very high, since those who live on the crest see the sun rise three hours before it rises on the seaboard. . . . [It is] so high that on its crests the sun is up and the people are weary of ploughing by the time cock-crow begins among the people who live on the shore."[18]

Mountains like Athos, however, served as more than landmarks for sailors and geographers. Since remote antiquity, high mountain peaks were used as beacons to convey long-distance messages. The Assyrians employed beacons at fixed distances of two hours' journey, and, since lighting a beacon could not convey detailed messages, a courier was dispatched with the news at the same time. The Persians, too, Herodotus informs us, set up an efficient system, stretching out from the coast of Asia Minor across the Aegean by way of the islands to Attica during their invasion of Greece in 480 BC.[19] The employment of fire signals by the Greeks became common by the time of the Peloponnesian War.[20]

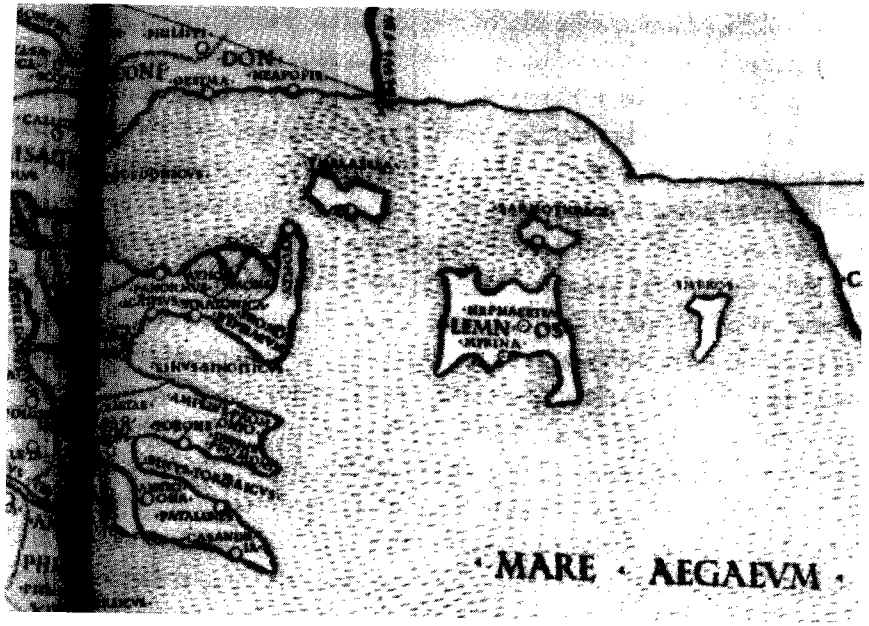


Fig. 2. Tabula X of Ptolemy's *Geography,* Rome, 1490. Detail with Mount Athos and the North Aegean. (The James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota)

Beacon signaling remained an effective means for long-distance communication until as late as the ninth century AD, when Leo the Philosopher Bishop of Thessalonica introduced a code of differing messages. The most famous example of beacon-relayed messages in the annals of ancient history is probably that communicating the capture of Troy by the Greeks after a ten-year siege. "News of victory was relayed almost instantly to Argos, where Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's faithless queen, was waiting to proclaim the joyful tidings to her people." As Aeschylus (ca. 458 BC) explains, the speed of the news was due to Athos's height, towering in the chain of beacons between Troy and Argos:[21]

> Hephaestus, launching a fine flame from Ida,
> Beacon forwarding beacon, dispatch riders of fire,
> Ida related to Hermes' cliff in Lemnos
> And the great glow from the island was taken over third
> By the height of Athos that belongs to Zeus,
> And towering then to straddle over the sea
> . . . . . .

> Blazing and bounding till it reached at length
> The Arachnaean steep, our neighboring heights;
> And leaps in the latter end on the roof of the sons of Atreus
> Issue and image of the fire on Ida
> . . . . . .
> Such is the proof I offer you, the sign
> My husband sent me out of Troy.[22]

According to Ellen Churchill Semple, the points enumerated by Clytaemnestra corresponded with seamarks that had been long familiar to the ancient sailors. Athos, however, was more than a prominent landmark on the horizon: it was a mountain-peninsula scattered with sanctuaries and populated by strange peoples.[23]

Pagan Temples and Serpent Eaters

Clytaemnestra's claim that the summit of Athos belonged to Zeus was not just an evocative metaphor. Pomponius Mela (first century AD) maintained that Athos "is so tall that it is believed to be even higher than the place from which the rains fall. The idea gets credibility because ashes do not wash off the altars that it has on its peak but remain on the mound where they are left. The mountain, however, proceeds to the sea not by a spur, as some say, but with its whole long ridge." Like other ancient geographers, Mela believed that the summit of Athos reached the highest layer of the atmosphere, where clouds and rains were formed.[24]

Semple took Clytaemnestra's words literally and linked the tempestuous summit of the mountain with the divinity of sky and storm. The American geographer argued that certain mountains, besides being seamarks and "telegraphic relays" *ante litteram,* served also as dispatchers of "meteorological bulletins." In other words, they encapsulated all the functions of modern radio navigation systems long before electromagnetic waves were discovered, or the compass invented.

Certain peaks that acquired local fame as "weather-breeders," Semple argued, became identified with Zeus. "Theophrastus states that, aside from particular constellations which were the celestial timekeepers of winter rains, weather signs were found chiefly on high mountains, especially those rising from the sea and exposed to rain-bearing winds." A turban of clouds on Mount

Oros in Aegina, for instance, was a sign of rain. Hence Athos, the most prominent height in or about the whole Saronic Gulf, "was the site of the ancient altar of Panhellenic Zeus, possibly a remnant of the legendary temple built there to Zeus, to secure the cessation of the long drought in the time of Aecus." Mount Athos, about four times the size of Mount Oros, was the main meteorological center of the North Aegean: "Mount Athos, 'the Thracian watch-tower of Athoan Zeus' . . . furnished a weather forecast for the north Aegean islands and coasts, as it does today. A mantle of clouds about Athos presaged a storm; a girdle of clouds half way up its slope indicated a southerly wind and eventual rain. Therefore Athos was sacred to Zeus, and has retained its sacred character to the present."[25] The "unwashed altars" on the peak of Athos described by Pomponius Mela would have thus been dedicated to Zeus, along with a bronze statue standing on the summit.

Local tradition, however, links pre-Christian Athos to Apollo, the god of light, and by extension the expression of intellect, discipline, purity, and heroic force. According to an early-sixteenth-century text preserved in *codex* 198 at Docheiariou Monastery and part of the larger *Πάτρια* corpus, Mount Athos hosted a sanctuary of Apollo renowned among all the Greeks of the *oikouménē* (inhabited world). The Virgin Mary, on her way to Cyprus to visit Lazarus, was diverted by a violent wind to Athos and converted its ancient inhabitants, who are described as οἱ ἄνδρες τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος, "the men of Apollo." The new Christians joyously fled from the god's temple to welcome their new patroness.[26]

Scully noted how Apollo's sanctuaries were constructed on sites that tended to embody grandeur and strife—what today we would define as sublime. Wherever earth seemed most "remote, tortuously approached, and largest in scale, and where they seemed to open up [her] interior secrets most violently or most dominated a thunderous view, there the temple of the young god was placed, and generally so oriented as not only to complement but also to oppose the chthonic forces." Such dramatic sites stood in sharp contrast with the bright and geometrical forms of the sanctuary, thus exalting the rationality and the heroic force of the deity.[27] According to the *Patria* version, on the summit of Athos, a statue of Apollo would have shone in the sun. Its gaze from above would have literally dominated the ancient inhabitants of the mountain. On the edge of its steep ravines, however, the young god would have also enjoyed the dramatic view of the stormy sea. If we are to follow Scully's interpretation, Athos's wild nature, with its sublime views and fierce elements, indeed seems

to constitute the ideal habitat for Apollo. Dinocrates, too, was most likely inspired by the combination of all these elements when he chose Athos to exalt the power of Alexander and decided to turn him into a "new Apollo."

Not only were Athos's forests untamed and its ravines dramatic. In the geographical imagination of the ancient Mediterranean people, the wild character of the mountain was also reflected in its mythical inhabitants. According to Pliny the Elder (AD 23/4–79), these lived 140 years, and "the reason verily is rendered to be thus, because they feed on vipers' flesh, and therefore is it that neither lice breed in their heads, nor other vermin in their clothes, to hurt and annoy their bodies."[28]

For Pliny, the wild nature of the mountain and the customs of its inhabitants were a single exotic entity. "What is true of the soil is true of the men," Hippocrates had stated about three centuries earlier. "Some men's characters resemble well-wooded and watered mountains, others a thin and waterless soil, others plains or dry bare earth." In the same way, Athos's rocks imprinted their mysterious inhabitants with some of their immortality—at least in the ancient Roman geographical imagination. Like its shadow, the longevity of Athos's dwellers became proverbial. According to the Roman Sophist Claudius Aelianus (AD 175–235), Plato himself, refusing to move to a healthier area, would have said: "I would not move [from my Academy] even to Athos to gain extra years of life."[29]

Pliny also informs us that the long-lived inhabitants of the Athonite peninsula dwelled in five cities: Ouranoupolis (from which the modern village took the name), Palaeorium, Thyssus, Cleonae, and Apollonia. Strabo and, long before him, Herodotus also made reference to these cities, though with some variations in their names (Dion, Olophryxos, Akrothoon, Thyssos, Kleonai). In Pseudo-Scylax's *Periplus,* a sort of sailor's handbook of places and distances around the coasts of the Mediterranean (third century AD), the inhabitants of all these cities were reported to be Greek. But apparently this had not always been the case. Thucydides (460–404 BC), author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War,* offered a complex ethnological picture of "mixed barbarian races" with a small Chalcidian element. The size of the towns, Thucydides argued, was not big. Nor, as far as we know, did they ever play a significant role in the course of Greek history. But they lived in the shadow of Athos and of its mythologies. An aura of mystery still surrounds their disappearance. When the first Christian hermits landed on Athos, they found only uncanny remains, upon which they built their own sacred geographies and pious traditions.[30]

Xerxes' Canal and Alexander's Colossus

In ancient times, the wild nature of the Athonite peninsula was not confined to the land and to its snake-eating inhabitants. Its mysterious, threatening character extended to the surrounding sea. This, Herodotus tells us in his famous account of the tragic Persian shipwreck in 492 BC, was deemed to be populated by monstrous creatures.

At that time, the Persian Empire was the strongest power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its dominion encompassed European Thrace and extended to the Chalkidikē Peninsula in Macedonia. These two provinces had recently supported the Ionian revolt (the first major conflict between Greece and Persia). In the spring of 492 BC, an expeditionary force commanded by Mardonius, son-in-law of King Darius, was dispatched to reestablish Persian authority over the rebel provinces. Thrace surrendered to the army without resistance. At the same time, the powerful Persian fleet conquered the island of Thasos, but, we are told by Herodotus, it tragically came to a halt in the proximity of the cape of Mount Athos:[31]

> From Thasos [the Persians] crossed over and traveled along, close to the land, as far as Acanthus; and setting out from Acanthus they tried to round Athos. But a great north wind, past coping with, fell on them as they would have rounded Athos and handled them very roughly indeed, wrecking a great number of their ships on Athos. It is said that the number of wrecks was three hundred and that more than twenty thousand men were killed. For the sea there around Athos is infested with [monsters], some were seized and destroyed by these creatures, and others of the men were battered to death on the rocks. Others of them drowned because they did not know how to swim, and others still died of the cold.[32]

The main reason for the shipwreck, according to Herodotus, was the strong north wind—today still a cause of violent sea storms and tragedies for the inhabitants of the peninsula.[33] The historian, however, attributed the disappearance of such a great number of men to frightening sea monsters, which Claudius Aelianus later identified with the *Trochus,* a species of whale of prodigious size. The memory of the Persian tragedy surrounded the mountain-peninsula for entire generations: it turned Athos into a landscape of fear. After the shipwreck and other misfortunes, the Persians withdrew without having concluded anything. They had to surrender to Athos's fierce nature.[34]

From a landscape of fear, wild Athos soon became an extraordinary setting for human challenges to nature. About a decade after the shipwreck, Xerxes, Darius's son, was ready to invade Macedonia again. This time, however, the Persian king decided to cut a canal on the isthmus which connected the Athonite peninsula to the mainland, and to have his ships pass through it. In this way, the fleet would have avoided the perilous waters off the point:

> In the first place, since the first expedition had come to grief as [the Persians] sailed around Athos, for about the last three years early preparations had been made to deal with Athos. Triremes were anchored off Elaeus in the Chersonese; and men from these, composed of all nations in the army, were set to work digging a channel, which they did under the lash, and they went to the task in relays. Those who lived around Athos also dug. . . . The Persian was determined to turn [the cities on the Athos peninsula] from mainland into island cities. . . . They drew a straight line near the city of Sane; and, when the channel grew deep, some of the men stood at the bottom and dug, and others handed over the spoil, as it was dug out, to others, who stood higher, on steps, and they, receiving it, to others higher still, until they came to those at the top. . . . As far as my guess goes, it was out of mere arrogance that Xerxes made them dig the channel, because he wanted to show his power and leave a memorial behind him.[35]

Although the canal seems to have collapsed soon after its construction and has left no visible sign, Xerxes nevertheless succeeded in his "arrogant purpose." In the Hellenistic and Roman imagination, the invisible canal remained a mythical memorial to the Persian king's foolishness, to be rivaled only by the megalomaniac vision of Dinocrates, Alexander the Great's architect.

Dinocrates' amazing story is narrated by Vitruvius in the preface to book 2 of his *De architectura* (first century AD). Dinocrates, we are told, proposed to his patron a colossal project with no antecedents in the history of ancient Greece: the carving of Mount Athos into a giant human figure—by implication that of Alexander. Just as Olympus was the throne of Zeus, the gods' sovereign, Athos would become the throne of Alexander, the ruler of the largest empire on the face of the *oikouménē.* The realization of a plan of such Herculean proportions was meant to celebrate Alexander the Great—himself a self-proclaimed descendant of Heracles. It was also conceived as the setting for the new city of Alexandria. The city was to be located on the left hand of the rocky colossus, whereas on the right hand a bowl would receive the waters of all the mountain's

streams. Such was the city, the young architect probably thought, deserved by the man who would reach the eastern edges of the *oikouménē,* paralleling the western passage of his predecessor.[36]

Altars and other stone landmarks celebrated Alexander's march from Asia Minor to the Indus River valley. At the river Hypasis in Punjab, columns were erected to match those of Heracles on the western extreme of the inhabited world. The stony pillars signified "the coincidence of empire, *oikouménē,* and Alexandrine destiny." Stone mapped Macedonian imperial discourse on territory and made it everlasting. By connecting the two edges of the *oikouménē,* stone also connected past, present, and eternity. Dinocrates conceived the Athos colossus as the most prominent landmark and central node within this "stone memory net."[37]

Enriched from his journeys with the experience and wisdom necessary for rule, Alexander the Great, however, did not let himself be blinded by flattery, nor by the megalomaniac fantasies of a young architect. In his enthusiasm, Dinocrates overlooked the practical aspects of his project. Was there, for example—Alexander wondered—an adequate provision of grain to supply such a city?

> On finding that this was impossible without transport from beyond the sea, "Dinocrates," quoth [Alexander], "I appreciate your design as excellent in composition, and I am delighted with it, but I apprehend that anybody who should found a city in that spot would be censured for bad judgement. For as a newborn babe cannot be nourished without the nurse's milk, nor conducted to the approaches that lead to growth in life, so a city cannot thrive without fields and the fruits thereof pouring into its walls, nor have a large population without plenty of food, nor maintain its population without a supply of it. Therefore, while thinking that your design is commendable, I consider the site as not commendable; but I would have you stay with me, because I mean to make use of your services."[38]

The majestic nature of Athos's peak, which had charmed Dinocrates, did not move Alexander. The irrational fury of the ancient rebellious titan was won by the rationality of the prototype of the heroic imperial figure. It was overcome by Alexander's semi-divine Apollonian gaze, able to look into the future, far beyond Dinocrates' reach.

Athos as a Literary Topos

Classical authors projected human vices and virtues on Athos's isthmus and peak, transforming the peninsula into a powerful rhetorical device, into a repository of contrasting metaphors. Herodotus condemned Xerxes. The canal, the Greek historian argued, was primarily intended as a propagandistic exploit to show the Greeks and the entire world the extent of Persian power. Brutally cutting sound territory, the canal's straight, artificial line stood as a testimony of barbarian arrogance—even before nature. Herodotus implicitly opposed such arrogance to "Greek equilibrium"; to the peaceful conciliation between man and environment that found its best visible expression in classical architecture.

Athos was a moral landmark metaphorically set on the imaginary boundary between the East and the West. It helped Greek authors define the "Orient," the great menacing "Otherness" in Western imagination. For Herodotus, Xerxes' Canal represented an actual doorway between Orient and Occident (just like the Suez Canal in the nineteenth century). It was a passage that allowed barbarous Persians to invade the Greek civilized world. In Aeschylus's *Persians* (472 BC), the irrational figure of Xerxes embodied a hostile and yet grieving, desolated Asia, an Asia speaking through the mouth of European imagination and destined to be eternally defeated in her challenge to the West. Otherness was projected onto Asia, Asia onto the Persian king, and the Persian king onto his canal—a memorial of the Orient's failed attempts to dominate the West and nature, and thus a monument to its foolish arrogance.[39]

Xerxes' Canal remained proverbial: it became a literary topos for classical authors. If the canal emblematized Xerxes' arrogance, for Lysias (ca. 459–380 BC), the Athenian orator arrested by the Thirty Tyrants, the labor behind its excavation revealed other weaknesses of human nature, such as cowardice and corruption. "Despising alike the effects of nature, the dispositions of Heaven and the purposes of men," the orator disparagingly recorded: "[Xerxes] made him a road across the sea, and forced a passage for ships through the land by spanning the Hellespont and trenching Athos; none withstood him, for the unwilling submitted, and the willing chose to be traitors. The former were not capable of resisting and the latter were corrupted by bribes."[40]

Similar criticisms were addressed by Isocrates (380 BC), another Athenian orator who later called for a Panhellenic crusade to expel the Persians from Asia Minor:

> What orator, however eager to overshoot the mark, has not fallen short of truth in speaking of this king, who rose to such a pitch of arrogance that thinking it a small task to subjugate Hellas, and proposing to leave a memorial such as one would mark a more than human power, did not stop until he had devised and completed the execution of a plan whose fame is on the lips of all mankind—a plan by which, having bridged the Hellespont and channeled Athos, he sailed his ships across the mainland, and marched his troops across the sea.[41]

From the fourth century BC to the second century AD, a number of authors, from Plato, Aristotle, and Aeschines to Lucian of Samosata, repeatedly used the extravagant figure of Xerxes "navigating Athos" and "marching on the Hellespont" as a rhetorical device. Xerxes personified what the ancient Greeks called *hubris*. Barbarian irrational instinct led the Persian king to rebel against things as they are. "Then like a child, who has fallen down and beats the earth in a passion of rage, the foolish savage tries to 'take it out' of what the wise man knows is stronger than all of us." Emblematically, we are told by Herodotus that when a great storm destroyed Xerxes' first attempt at bridging the Hellespont, the Persian king grew so furious that he commanded his men to punish the sea.[42]

According to the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (AD 20–50), Xerxes, not satisfied with the "revolution in nature" he had caused on Athos and in the Hellespont, "proceeded in the boldness of his schemes to mount heaven also, taking, unhappy wretch, impiety as his fellow climber. He thought to remove the irremovable and to overthrow the divine host. . . . For he aimed his arrows at the best heavenly bodies, the sun who rules the day, and little knew that he himself was wounded by the unseen bolt of insanity." Xerxes thus became an anti-Apollo.[43]

According to a local legend, the summit of Mount Athos served the foolish king to practice for this new target. The legend tells us that Xerxes attempted to cleave a way right through the peak, and so humble the pride of the lofty mountain. "His slaves set to work, and the great stones in this ravine were thrown down by them when they were engaged at their hopeless task. But some slight impression they did make; on the landward side of the main peak there is a very much smaller peak; the effect is as if a great notch had been hacked out in the ridge. This notch . . . is all that the slaves of the king could accomplish."[44]

Alexander the Great himself, according to Plutarch (AD 45–125), would have said to Dinocrates: "Let Athos remain as it is. It is enough that it be the memorial of the arrogance of one king." The opposition between irrational Xerxes and wise Alexander was especially present in the works of Lucian of Samosata, which were composed mostly under the reign of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180). Lucian lived in a time of nostalgia for what was supposed to have been the "Great Hellas." This had died long ago, in 323 BC, together with Alexander the Great and with the consequent breakup of his empire. Worse, however, was to come in the second century BC, when Greece lost its independence and was incorporated into the Roman Empire. Lucian's Hellas was just a divided province under Hadrian and the Antonines. Its classical cultural heritage was nevertheless greatly appreciated by the philhellenic emperors. Lecture halls were crowded with Greek intellectuals who, like Lucian, flocked to hear sophists declaiming in the best Attic style on themes based on the famous periods of ancient Greek history. Alexander fiction was one of the most popular themes in an expanding Roman Empire.[45]

In the writings of Lucian and Plutarch, the stories of Dinocrates and Xerxes were separated by time, but converged in the same place: Athos. The mountain-peninsula became the meeting point between the antithetical figures of the Persian and the Macedonian kings. It became the point of junction between opposed poles: barbarian/Greek, East/West, evil/good, foolishness/wisdom, and so on. In other words, it became a literary topos for meditation.

Lucian seemed to have a certain fascination with mountains (especially mountains with mythological connotations). High mountain peaks allowed a view from above, and thus helped make apparent the insignificance and futility of men and their world. The arrogance and vanity of men like Xerxes—the main targets of Lucian's attacks—derived from their inability to recognize their faults. This, in turn, arose from their incapacity to gain the objectivity and the necessary distance provided by the Apollonian view from above. In one of Lucian's satirical works, Charon and Hermes eradicated and piled up the four famous mountains of Ossa, Pelion, Oeta, and Parnassus, and sat upon the topmost one contemplating the earth:

> Charon: I see a vast stretch of land, and a huge lake surrounding it,
> and mountains, and rivers bigger than Cocytus and Pyriphlegethon;
> and men, tiny little things! and I suppose their dens . . . [but] these cities and mountains
> look for all the world like a map. It is *men* that I am after.[46]

In his Stoic *Meditations,* Marcus Aurelius elevated himself even higher than the two divinities. He reached the point where Asia and Europe appeared as "distant recesses of the universe," and

> The ocean: a drop of water.
> Mount Athos: a molehill.
> The present: a split second in eternity.
> Minuscule, transitory, insignificant.[47]

Pairing Athos with Asia, Europe and the ocean, the Roman emperor recognized its majesty—and yet its insignificance when compared to the extent of the *kosmos.*[48]

Charon and Hermes did not pile Athos upon the other mountains. They left it in its place, as the stable landmark Alexander decided to leave intact. In the works of earlier Latin authors like Catullus, Ovid, or Juvenal, Athos was used as an effective symbol of extreme difficulty, of the untamed, of the humanly impossible.[49]

Athos's proverbial magnificence was echoed also in Virgil's verses. In the *Georgics* (36–29 BC), the Macedonian peak made its appearance in the dramatic description of a midnight thunderstorm. From its summit and from those of other high mountains, Jupiter launched terrifying thunders:

> The Sire himself in midnight of the clouds
> Wields with red hand the levin; through all her bulk
> Earth at the hurly quakes; the beasts are fled,
> And the mortal hearts of every kindred sunk
> In cowering terror; he with flaming brand
> Athos, or Rhodope, or Ceraunian crags precipitates.[50]

In the *Georgics'* depiction of "the eternal struggle of human life and the alternating sympathy and hostility of nature," Athos continued to represent a mythical landmark inspiring awe and fear. It nevertheless remained an exotic landmark. The mountain embodied the combination of wonder and solidity characteristic of the poem. The *Georgics* are imbued with a certain exoticism, common in the Alexandrian literary tradition, from which Virgil drew profusely. Hints at landscapes of distant lands are used as contrasting opposites of Italian regions: a fantastic Orient full of richness made present through Gargarus, Mysia, Tmolus, Sabea; the remote frigid regions with the *ultima* Thule and Scythia; the highest peaks of Athos, Rhodope, and the Ceraunians. If for

Greek authors, like Lucian, Athos was part of a mythical otherness in the past, for the Mantuan poet, it was a landmark of a geographical Other.[51]

Athos made its appearance also in the *Aeneid,* this time in far less dramatic circumstances. Here the mountain is used as a metaphor to describe Aeneas's joy at hearing the name of his beloved son:

> But Sire Aeneas, hearing Turnus' name,
> Down the steep rampart from the citadel
> Unlingering tried, all lesser task laid by,
> With joy exultant and dread-thundering arms.
> Like Athos' crest he loomed, or soaring top
> Of Eryx, when the nodding oaks resound,
> Or sovereign Apennine that lifts in air
> His forehead of triumphant snow.[52]

Personification, the transferring of human attributes (both physical and moral) to things, was a common rhetorical device in Virgil's works. Here, however, the opposite figure was employed: mountain images were transferred to a person, or rather to his state of mind. Their visual immediateness, their physical graspability, translated feelings into substance.

For Virgil, just as for Ovid, Catullus, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucian, Athos was a rhetorical device, a literary loan. It was also a landscape of myth which stirred the geographical imagination of these authors, who never actually saw the majestic mountain towering over the Aegean. If, for Thucydides, Herodotus, and Strabo, Athos was an ontological place, and for Ptolemy a carefully measured mathematical place, for their successors, Athos was a metaphor, an epistemological construction. For the Latin authors, Athos was at once a vestige of a mythical world alive in their imagination and which might have never existed; it was a remarkable landmark in the complex map of human moral values. As such, it would reach Renaissance Italy and assume new meanings.

Athos as Emblem

Mythical Athos and the Vitruvian Body

> [Dinocrates] was, I should state, a man of tall stature, pleasing countenance, and altogether of dignified appearance. Trusting in the gifts with which nature

> had thus endowed him, he put off his ordinary clothing, and having anointed himself with oil, crowned his head with a wreath of poplar, slung a lion's skin across his left shoulder, and carrying a large club [Hercules' traditional attributes] in his right hand, he sallied forth to the royal tribunal, at a period when the king was dispensing justice. The novelty of his appearance excited the attention of the people; and Alexander soon discovering, with astonishment, the object of their curiosity, ordered the crowd to make way for him, and demanded to know who he was. "A Macedonian architect," replied Dinocrates, "who suggests schemes and designs worthy of your royal renown. I propose to form Mount Athos into the statue of a man holding a spacious city in his left hand, and in his right a huge cup, into which shall be collected all the streams of the mountain, which shall then be poured into the sea."—Vitruvius, *De architectura*, 2:1–2

The myth of Dinocrates owes most of its popularity in the West to Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, an aging military architect who worked for Augustus Caesar, the new ruler of the Roman Empire in the mid-20s BC. Rediscovered in the fifteenth century, Vitruvius's *De architectura* became one of the most influential architectural texts throughout the European Renaissance. Vitruvius's conceptualization of architecture as a formalized, theoretically founded form of knowledge became pivotal in a context in which art, emancipating itself from its subservient role, was envisaged as "a mirror of measurable reality." With Ptolemy's *Ὑφήγησις*, Vitruvius's treatise reflected and legitimized a new spatial perception of the *kosmos* and the human body.[53]

In 1452, the famous Italian humanist Leon Battista Alberti completed his ten books of the *De re aedificatoria*, a foundation theory based on the Vitruvian model in which the body served as the architectural canon, or unit of measure. This powerful metaphor was later visually rendered by Leonardo's famous encircled Vitruvian man. Buildings were conceived as "kinds of bodies" whose lines were produced by the mind and whose materials were obtained from nature.[54]

The Vitruvian man as unit of measure and the metaphorical exchange between the human body and inanimate matter made Vitruvius's Dinocratic myth especially appealing to fifteenth-century humanists. Alexander the Great had himself used an evocative body metaphor by comparing the city to an infant and the surrounding crops to the nourishing mother. For Alberti, however, the myth served first of all as a warning about the "monstrosities" generated by those architects who tried to challenge natural laws out of pure egotism. For the Renaissance humanist, Dinocrates embodied a negative model, an

uncomfortable threat to classical harmony and practicality. The fifteenth-century commentator Buonaccorso Ghilberti, for example, was so embarrassed by the myth that he had Dinocrates "withdraw the whole idea after second thoughts, offering elaborate explanations of its impracticability."[55]

Later theoreticians found in the Dinocratic myth fertile ground for further elaboration. In 1470, Vitruvius's *De architectura* was for the first time translated from Latin into vernacular thanks to Francesco di Giorgio Martini of Siena, a sculptor, painter, and military architect. This Tuscan *uomo universale* wrote a popular treatise in which he attempted to work out "a system of ideal architectural proportions based on the form of the human body." In the treatise, the Dinocratic myth was used to show the necessity of human scale in urban planning, but also the virtues of the classical body. Among all the ancient authors, Vitruvius was the one who paid most attention to the description of Dinocrates' body. Anointed with perfumed oils, Dinocrates' beautiful naked body incarnated perfection. It was the statuary body of Hercules, on which the head of the young architect had been inserted. It was this body that diverted Alexander's gaze and enabled the architect to engage in a Herculean conversation with the king, himself a self-proclaimed descendant of Hercules.[56]

In Francesco di Giorgio's *Trattato*, the account of the Dinocratic myth was accompanied by the drawing of a languid naked male figure, wearing, like Hercules, a lion skin on his shoulders. In his right hand, he held a bowl; in his left, a model of a fortress (see fig. 3). While the lion skin and the nakedness easily suggest that the youngster is Dinocrates, the fortified citadel reveals a second, more subtle identification: that of the Macedonian architect with Francesco di Giorgio, offering his patron, Federico Duke of Urbino, his service as his military architect.

In the preface to the *Trattato*, Francesco di Giorgio mentions great conquering princes such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, "who had sometimes the architect Vitruvius in his camp, treating him with great kindness and familiarity—the analogy to the Duke and himself is already present." By addressing his *De architectura* to Caesar Augustus, Vitruvius had compared himself to Dinocrates and the Roman emperor to Alexander. By comparing himself to Vitruvius and the duke to Caesar, Francesco di Giorgio perpetuated this ancient chain of mutual trust between architect and patron.[57]

Illustrating a myth in which flesh fuses into stone, however, the naked youth might also stand for an anthropomorphic rendering of Dinocratic Athos, holding a bowl and a city. For Francesco di Giorgio, the mountain was itself a body

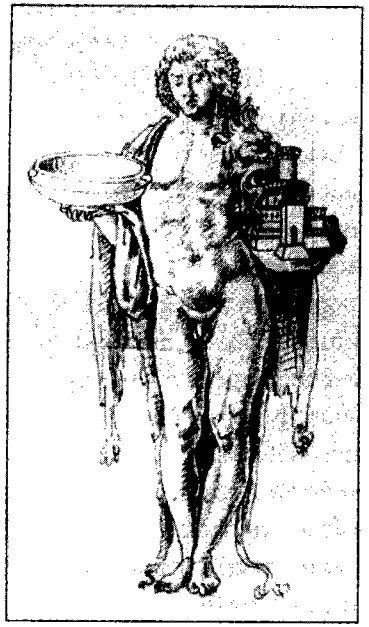


Fig. 3. Anthropomorphic rendering of the Dinocratic myth in Francesco di Giorgio Martini's *Trattato di architettura,* sec. XV, ca. 1470. (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Fondo Nazionale, ms. II.I.141, fol. 27v; by concession of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali della Repubblica Italiana/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze; this image may not be reproduced by any other method)

pulsating with life. Dinocrates, Francesco tells us, "personally presented himself to Alexander, for he had heard Alexander wanted to edify a new city; he therefore sketched Athos in the shape of a man holding in his left hand a cup into which all the veins of the body converged, and in the right the walls of the new city."[58]

Athos's hybrid body of stone and flesh magnified the human body as "a microcosmic measure of the world machine." It exalted the idea that "man, called a little world, contains in himself all the general perfections of the whole world." Echoing Pico della Mirandola, Francesco claimed that "man, touching things inanimate in his nourishment and growth, has affinity with plants, in his feelings with brute beasts, and lastly in his reason with the world of spirit; so that the Greeks came to call him a Mikrokosmos that is in himself a little world." The mythical fusion between Dinocrates' fleshy body and Athos's rock helped reify the ideal of the humanistic microcosmic man. In its impracticability, Dinocratic Athos provided an ancient dream with visual consistency.[59]

The body as a microcosm was not only a unit of measure central to Renaissance culture. It was also the vital link between the Greco-Roman classical past and a no less anthropocentric Christian present. For Alberti, Filarete, Francesco

di Giorgio, and the humanists of early Renaissance, classical antiquity was not simply "the unsurpassable and normative": it fostered confidence that moderns might not only benefit from their ancient predecessors, but even surpass their greatness. While scholars like Pico della Mirandola were dreaming of harmonizing the tradition of the Western Church with classical and Jewish thought, Francesco di Giorgio and other Vitruvian scholars dissected, studied, and sketched the monuments of ancient Rome. To them, classical antiquity was a mythical land open to intellectual conquest. It was a golden, utopian realm humanists sought to reappropriate and adapt to their own needs—each in their own special way.[60]

In this complex landscape, ancient myths, like that of Dinocrates, did not remain mere authoritative quotations. They became true landmarks through which scholars and artists could orient themselves and make sense of the otherwise often obscure language of their Latin predecessors. In the 1520s, another allegorical rendering of Dinocratic Athos made its appearance in Fossombrone's sketchbook (Raphael school). The languid figure of Dinocrates/ Vitruvius/Francesco di Giorgio/Athos turned into an awe-inspiring elder lying against a mountain and holding a bowl and a utopian city in his hands. This time the juxtaposition was topographical. The figure of a river-god potentially alluded to the Nile, and thus to the city of Alexandria located on the delta of the river (a more "practical" alternative to Athos). In Fossombrone's representation, the Herculean body turned into a Neptunean body. The Vitruvian body was complemented by sketchy natural elements, like rocks, trees, and rivers. These elements marked the beginnings of a new metamorphosis.[61]

Mythical Athos and the Pontifical Body

More than one century later, the sketchy mountain against which Fossombrone's river-god had lain began to acquire corporality. It turned into solid rock, becoming one with the Vitruvian body (fig. 4). While invoked as a negative model to be avoided by every possible means, Dinocrates' vision continued to stir the Western imagination for entire generations. The fact that the project was never realized allowed free play with the scale of the idea. The fantasy of the mountain colossus kept haunting the dreams of egocentric popes.[62]

If early Renaissance humanists felt a certain discomfort, or embarrassment, even in their attempts to depict Dinocrates' monstrous mountain in their mind, in the late seventeenth century all the preconditions for its visual

reification appeared to exist. Early Renaissance reliance on classical canons and equilibrium were overcome by baroque excess. Theatricality took the place of practicality. Monumentality prevailed over proportion; spectacle over nature; egotism over rationality. Such was the context in which Fabio Chigi ascended to the papacy and appropriated Dinocratic Athos as his own personal emblem.

The official painter and architect at the pontifical court, Pietro da Cortona (1596–1669) was no less shameless than Dinocrates. Like Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Vitruvius, da Cortona invoked the mountain colossus to boost the egotism of his powerful patron. He thus made himself a worthy inheritor of a tradition of obsequiousness and flattery initiated by the mythical Macedonian architect. Weaving together nature and the Chigian symbols through a topographic myth, da Cortona turned Athos into the mountain that was featured on Alexander VII's coat of arms, with its pyramidal shape, star, and oak. Like the mountain, the pope's name was itself consciously conflated with that of the great Macedonian king—a common convention among Roman emperors and popes. Alexander the Great's refusal of the Dinocratic project was similarly exploited as a prestigious antecedent of the pope's rejection of the Senate's proposal to erect a statue of him on the Campidoglio to celebrate his valuable endeavors to eradicate the plague from the city of Rome.[63]

But the pope's modesty and all his other noble virtues vanished quickly. As the future canon of Canterbury critically recorded in his diary:

> In the first months of his elevation to the Popedom, [Alexander VII] had so taken upon himself profession of an evangelical life that he would season his meat with ashes, sleep upon a hard couch, hate riches, glory and pomp, taking a great pleasure to give audience to ambassadors in a chamber full of dead men's skulls, and in the sight of his coffin, which stood there to put him in mind of his death. But as soon as he had called his relations about him he changed his nature. Instead of humility, succeeded vanity; his mortification vanished, his hard couch was turned into a soft featherbed, his dead men's skulls into jewels, and his thoughts of death into ambition—filling his empty coffin with money as if he would corrupt death, and purchase life with riches.[64]

Alexander VII's tomb, a baroque masterpiece by Bernini, stands at the Vatican as an imposing memento to the pope's vanity and to the vanity of human affairs (fig. 5). Its variety of precious marbles and gold echoed the theatricality and

pomp to which the pope had yielded. This monument ironically gave corporeal form to the virtues Alexander had lost in the course of his pontifical career. A winged skeleton holding a sandglass invited the beholder to meditate on the futility of terrestrial life and on the remembrance of death. Located above an actual door, it reminded the visitor to Saint Peter's Basilica that the doors to the otherworld might open wide at any time. The skeleton unveiled a female allegory of Truth leaning her left foot upon a globe featuring the Ptolemaic *oikouménē:* the same inhabited world contemplated by Lucian's Charon, Marcus Aurelius, and entire generations of Stoic and neo-Stoic thinkers. The globe reminded the viewer of the pontifical dream of a universal Catholic empire extending *ad termini orbis terrarum.*[65]

Counterbalancing Truth, a female personification of Charity turned her imploring gaze to the pope, who sat above everything (above Truth, Charity, and even above death itself). Frozen in a hieratic pose, the defunct pope became a mountain—the same pyramidal Chigian mountain that was featured on his emblem and represented by da Cortona as Athos. The corporality of stone, masterfully domesticated by Bernini and echoed in the mountains engraved on the coat of arms and on the pope's robes, provided Alexander VII's memory with new consistency and meaning. As with Pietro da Cortona's Athos, it also revealed to the beholder the pope's greatest disease: what his contemporaries called *mal di pietra.*

Alexander VII's incurable building mania spoiled the state finances, but allowed him to become one of the greatest architectural popes of all times. Alexander aimed at beautifying the capital like the ancient Roman emperors. During his twelve-year pontificate (1655–67), he revolutionized Rome's urban geography. He arranged his Roma Alexandrina through stagelike squares and scenic openings onto the glorious monuments of antiquity. Roma Alexandrina was a city studied to impress the foreign visitor as the *caput mundi* it once had been. The pope was, in fact, conscious that his Church no longer carried its traditional political weight. As Richard Krautheimer comments: "the wars of religion had failed. Newly dominant among the world powers, England and the Netherlands were both Protestant, and among the Catholic powers Rome no longer counted as a political force."[66]

However, as the illustrious foreigner was conducted from square to square (or from theater to theater), "Alexander VII was parodied in the streets as the '*papa di grande edificazione,*' a biting word play not on his intellectual capacity and achievements, but on what some deemed his outrageous building exploits."

Fig. 4. Acquaforte by Pietro da Cortona representing Alexander VII and Dinocratic Athos, ca. mid-seventeenth century. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Alexander's stony disease was truly pathological. It did not abandon the pope even after death: satires depicted him in purgatory, "designing amphitheaters and fountains to rebuild the place as he had done with Rome."[67]

Biographers and ambassadors tell us that the pope had a wooden model of Rome in his bedroom whose moveable parts anticipated demolitions and reconstructions in the city he dominated from the top of the Quirinal hill. To the poor Roman citizens who saw their dwellings torn down to make space for new theatrical piazzas, the pope's Apollonian gaze from above had the same harmful effects averted by Christ on the Mount of Temptation (Matt. 4:8). To the foreign visitor, the pyramidal Chigian mount that featured on the ubiquitous coats of arms engraved in monuments and coins echoed the proverbial egotism inscribed in Athos's titanic mythologies. Along with Alexander VII's

Fig. 5. Alexander VII's funerary monument in the Basilica of Saint Peter, Vatican. (Photograph by the author)

sumptuous funerary monument, Dinocratic Athos probably remained the greatest memorial to the pope's *mal di pietra*.[68]

On his Athos engraving, da Cortona sought to convey both the pope's pragmatism as an urban planner and his visionary character. Alexander VII was thus immortalized in a practical dialogue with his two obsequious architects: Pietro da Cortona and his mythical predecessor Dinocrates. As stated on the upper inscription, the pope's "greater virtue makes art of [such] bold ventures." Contemporary Roma Alexandrina was also integrated into the mountain and linked to the mythical past. It was visually connected to Dinocrates' city through a perspective line formed by the arms of the colossus and the copious river flowing out from his bowl, conveying the copiousness of pontifical wealth and creative powers.[69]

The choice of Mount Athos as a Chigian symbol was part of Alexander

VII's broader antiquarian and political project. The pope did not aim only at a temporal union between his Rome and that of the ancient emperors. He was deeply fascinated with the history and the mythology of the East, and made no secret about his ambitions to reclaim the Eastern territories and reunite the Latin and Oriental churches. In the Western geographical imagination, Athos, the bedrock of Orthodoxy, was situated historically between classical mythology and the Eastern Christian tradition, and geographically on the imaginary East-West boundary classical authors traced after Xerxes' enterprise. Leone Allacci, the intellectual advisor of the pope and custodian of the Vatican Library, was himself a Catholic convert from Orthodoxy, and it is most likely that he may have consulted with the pope and da Cortona on the preparation of the Athos composition.[70]

Six pontificates after Alexander VII, Dinocratic Athos was "recycled" to celebrate pope Clement XI (1700–1711), another distinguished patron of art and scholarship "worthy to be commemorated as heir of Alexander the Great." The representation of the mountain-colossus remained the same, but the portrait of the new pope was substituted for that of Alexander VII's. In the course of this process of appropriation and reappropriation, Mount Athos lost most of its geographical and symbolic coordinates. It turned into pure stereotype, into a free-floating symbol more and more abstracted from its geographical and historical context. The iconographic overlaps between Athos and the Chigian mount, between Alexander the Great and Alexander VII, between mythical Alexandria and Roma Alexandrina, however, effectively conveyed the pope's special relationship with stone and classical mythology. They also conveyed the immortal power of his imperialistic aspirations.[71]

The legacy between Alexander VII and rocky element was also exalted by Ciro Ferri, another artist in Roma Alexandrina and a disciple of Pietro da Cortona since his early youth. On a 1660 representation, Ferri literally embedded the pontifical body in the rock (fig. 6). With Ferri's engraving, Alexander VII cast Dinocrates' colossus out of Athos and made the mountain his own throne. As in his funerary monument, the figure of the pope towered over Rome's seven hills, which were rendered as allegorical figures of the virtues. Just as Alexander's Apollonian gaze from the Quirinale dominated the city, in Ferri's engraving the pope's "rocky" presence ruled over the anthropomorphic hills and human virtues in his commanding, awe-inspiring gesture. Like Veritas and her globe in the Bernini tomb, a *putto* perched on the Chigian oak on the

right held the papal *sphaera mundi* as a further reminder of the universality of pontifical power proclaimed in the dedicatory inscription:

> To Alexander VII, the Pontifex Maximus, raised from the mountains of Siena to the highest sovereignty of the seven-hilled city, embracing with his power not the Orient and the Occident, like Alexander, who, deceived by the Scytes, thought he could hold them in his hands, but heaven and earth. [To him is dedicated] this image, picture not of [Dinocrates]' architectural hyperbole, but with the greatest figure of a humblest homage, not for a highest sepulchral ornament, not like the highest cliff transformed into Semiramis' statue, but from the six noble mountains of the pontifical [city]. To eternity abbot Giulio Canani from Ferrara consecrated [this] carved [image].[72]

The rocky element marked and magnified Alexander's escalation "from the *mountains* of Siena" to Rome, the "seven-*hilled* city." It turned a dedicatory inscription, itself engraved on rock, into a memento to last for eternity. Two colossal "rocky stories"—the Dinocratic myth, and the monument to the legendary Assyrian queen Semiramis—established a link between the imperial Rome of Alexander VII and classical Greece, as well as with the ancient Near East. Like da Cortona's, Ferri's mythical references reflected the pope's fascination with the ancient and the exotic—a fascination translated in the actual landscape of Roma Alexandrina, with its classical monuments and obelisk-centered piazzas. Alexander's *mal di pietra* was doubly ecumenical—in space and in time.

Mythical Athos and the Body Politic

Alexander VII's identification with Alexander the Great was visually evocative, but certainly not unique, nor particularly original. Few other figures of antiquity have been as exploited in Western culture as has the Macedonian king. An ambiguous character throughout the Middle Ages, consigned by Dante Alighieri to the flames of the Inferno, in the European Renaissance Alexander reemerged via Plutarch as an uncontested champion of virtue. His role as a military commander was progressively supplanted by that of the wise ruler. His story of conquest was associated with the cosmopolitan ideal of a common

humanity, and his rule with the "discourse of universal empire through which a 'Western' culture has consistently constructed itself."[73]

Alexander's military and cosmopolitan connotations obviously manifested a rare appeal for popes and cardinals other than Alexander VII. Possible parallels between past and present, Persians and Turks, Alexander's empire and the "civilized Christian world" further increased the lure of Alexander Invictissimus, adding new legitimacy to pontifical power. Like the Macedonian ruler, popes of all times dreamed of extending their domain to the edges of the newly expanded *oikouménē* through their armies of Jesuit missionaries. By defeating the infidel Turks, the pope was to become the "New Alexander," the ruler of a universal empire.[74]

"You will win still greater grace and glory if, as all expect, you conduct yourself with the greatest severity towards the Turks and behave *as a new Alexander the Great* towards those kings of the East and their people that know not Christ; so we must pray for the greatest good and hope that it will come to pass, that you will unite the Eastern Church with that of the West, and that all will address you and submit to you *as a true Alexander the Great,* Supreme Pontiff of the Earth, King of the World and Successor of Christ," the ambassador of Savoy Pietro Cara wrote to the newly elected Alexander VI in 1492.[75]

In 1683, the Polish-Austrian-German forces led by the king of Poland, John III Sobieski, defeated the Ottoman army in the Battle of Vienna, after a two-month siege. The battle broke the advance of the Ottoman Empire into Europe, and marked the beginning of the Habsburgs' hegemony in Central Europe. Three years later, the armies of Sobieski and Leopold I, together with a number of volunteers from different parts of Europe, entered Budapest, which had been under Ottoman domination for the last century and a half. In 1699, the Venetians once again defeated the Turks and captured Morea. All these victories had a tremendous resonance in western Europe. Few other events struck the popular imagination with the same force as these joint vigorous actions of a militant Catholicism against the "dark" forces of Islam. Similarly, few other events probably made the pope feel so close to becoming a "new Alexander the Great" and "King of the World."

These victories pervaded pontifical Rome with a new wave of optimism: that of the so-called *Ecclesia triumphans.* In late-seventeenth-century arts, past and present glories were conflated in a triumphal adaptation of biblical and (once again) classical scenes. The boundaries between the sacred, the mythical, and the political blurred once again. Increasingly popular, graphic representations

Fig. 6. Ciro Ferri, *Allegorical Portrait of Alexander VII,* 1660. (Roma Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica)

of the Dinocratic myth acquired more elaborate and theatrical forms. Their subject was no longer the Vitruvian body or the body of the pope, but the colossal likeness of Alexander the Great himself.[76]

Giovan Battista Gaulli, or Baciccio (1639–1709), along with Pozzo, the most accredited interpreter of the *Ecclesia triumphans,* left a good example of this (fig. 7). In his Dinocratic sketch, Baciccio portrayed Alexander the Great as a ruler dressed in his armor. Instead of the bowl and the city, the colossus held the symbols of universal power: the orb and the scepter. Francesco di Giorgio and Pietro da Cortona's languid bodies were replaced with the ruler's

Fig. 7. Giovan Battista Gaulli, monument for Alexander the Great, seventeenth century. (Düsseldorf, Museum Kunst Palast, Sammlung der Kunstakademie [NRW], KA [FP] 1923)

imperial posture. Effeminate nude forms gave way to a firm stance and solemn *drappeggi.* A pyramidal Mount Athos provided Alexander with a natural wooded throne. The "rocky" presence of the ruling colossus turned into the quintessential incarnation and unequivocal emblem of power.[77]

By the end of the century, Dinocratic Athos proliferated in carnival parades and cabinets of curiosities, or *Wunderkammern,* as a bizarre object of wonder. It also appeared on album frontispieces and students' theses as a symbol of excellence. The French print-maker Dominique Barrière, one of the closest collaborators of Borromini since the 1650s, produced an elaborate example which was incorporated in a thesis on civil rights in 1699. Alexander the Great was now enthroned on the top of the mountain and dominated the verdant landscape below with an oak in the foreground. Two cherubs carried a banner inscribed "*per alta*" (through the heights), echoing the majesty and excellence of the Macedonian ruler.[78]

Like Baciccio, Barrière placed particular emphasis on vegetation. From emblem in the pope's coat of arms, here the Chigian oak became a "living" celebratory presence. The sacred tree, symbol of eternity and strength since antiquity, echoed the immortality of Alexander the Great himself. Its presence

and the predominance of greenery suggested life and vigor. They suggested the "vegetal resurrection" of the *Ecclesia triumphans* entailed by Bernini's baroque columns, twisting like creepers, or Corinthian capitals blossoming in all their vitality, announcing an imminent rebirth. Through vegetation, Barrière resurrected the body of Alexander the Great from da Cortona's antiquarian mannerism and made it a theatrical living presence.

A few years later, another European architect attempted to return Athos to its "original" Dinocratic form and "geographical coordinates." The first engineer at the courts of Joseph I and Charles VI, and one of the great masters of Austrian baroque, Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach published the *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur* in 1712. This was an extraordinary atlas which illustrated the development of architecture through fantastic engravings. Baroque reconstructions of the Seven Wonders and the great mythical monuments of the ancient world were literally put on the map of the Eastern Mediterranean, and used by the Viennese artist as a sort of visual table of contents (fig. 8). More than any other place in the late baroque European geographical imagination, this region echoed with colossal enterprises and legendary buildings, most of which no longer existed: the Pharos of Alexandria, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Labyrinth of Crete, the temple of Diana at Ephesus, the Tower of Babel, and so on. On Fischer von Erlach's map, the icon of Dinocratic Athos was portrayed as the Macedonian node of this mythical network.

On the corresponding atlas plate (fig. 9), Alexander's masculine warriorlike body was exalted by a landscape of vegetation, water, and rock, with which it became one. Dinocratic Athos was a bizarre geographical *Wunderkammer* object located at the heart of the ancient cradle of myth and civilization from which von Erlach's architectural narrative spread. Covered by alpine pine trees and surrounded by water, Egyptian palms, and camels, the legendary mountain appeared suspended between the familiar North and the exotic South. Opposed imagined Mediterranean iconographies were conflated in the same image.

It was in this familiar yet mysterious Mediterranean that European antiquarians avidly searched for exotic pieces to enrich their *Wunderkammern.* During his sixteen years in Italy, von Erlach became acquainted with several of these antiquarians, including Athanasius Kircher and Giovanni Pietro Bellori, who considered Egypt the source of civilization and owned remarkable cabinets of curiosities. Fischer von Erlach's *History of Architecture* was itself a "pictorial chamber of wonders," and Dinocratic Athos was one of its most remarkable pieces.

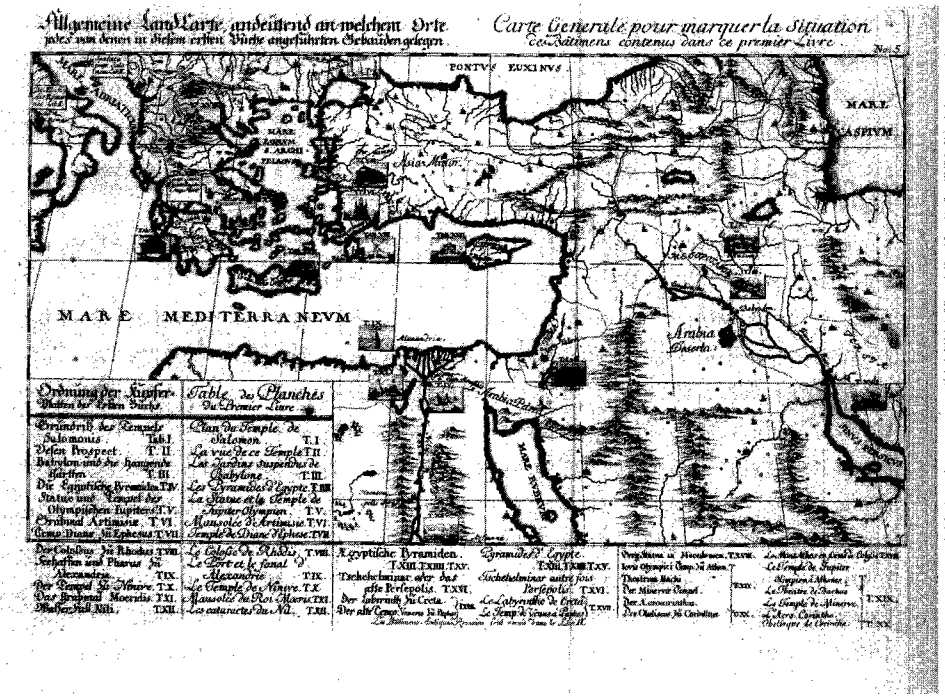


Fig. 8. Map of the Eastern Mediterranean and its ancient monuments, in Fischer von Erlach's *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur,* Leipzig, 1712. (Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California)

While not intended for political or celebratory purposes, Fischer von Erlach's Athos might be easily traced back to the same tradition of natural giantism that inspired Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651; fig. 10) and, in general, of the modern Western idea of the state as a sublimated force of nature. In seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Europe, natural landscapes "made it easier to believe that different historically constituted polities and places could be unified within the space of a body politic as embodied by a geographical body." In these landscapes, mountains incarnated princely liberality. They were, as the seventeenth-century Spanish diplomat and emblematist Saavedra Fajardo put it, "the princes of the earth, being closest to the sky and superior to the other works of nature. Moreover, they resemble princes by virtue of generosity with which their great bowls slake the thirst of the fields and valleys with inexhaustible springs and so clothe them with leaves and flowers; this is the virtue most proper to a prince."[79]

Fig. 9. Fischer von Erlach's Dinocratic Athos, in *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur,* Leipzig, 1712. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

An emblem of power in spite of itself, by the end of the eighteenth century, Dinocratic Athos had become consciously political. From bizarre physical curio, the mountain king became a disembodied entity: a pure ideal without any relationship to its original geographical and mythical referent. In Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes's oil painting (1796), a benevolent variant of Poussin's *Polyphemus,* the mountain king moved to the background (fig. 11). From its summit, it calmly stared back to a group of classicizing figures embedded in an exuberantly green foreground. The Vitruvian attributes vanished within the massive rocky figure. From body embedded in the mountain, the colossus became an autonomous presence within Valenciennes's bucolic landscape. No longer a mountain-peninsula in the Aegean, Athos was now a purely fantastic mountain just out of Fontainebleau forest, in the arcadia of the Western imagination.[80]

Valenciennes's painting was exhibited at the Salon of the Republican Year

Fig. 10. Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, 1651. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [C.175.n.3])

Fig. 11. Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, *Mount Athos Carved as a Monument to Alexander the Great*, 1796. Oil on canvas, 41.9 × 91 cm. (Restricted gift of Mrs. Harold T. Martin, 1983.36, Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago)

VIII, "when enthusiasms were running high for both Hellenic purity and the cult of nature." The painting turned Athos into an icon of benevolent republican sovereignty. The surrounding impossibly gentle verdant landscape became directly dependent "on the mountainous authority of the paternal state." Paintings like this displayed in the salons played an important didactic role in French political consciousness at a time in which neoclassical aesthetics was the official language of the *République*, as an inexhaustible source of moral precepts, exalted characters, and exemplary attitudes. From antiquarian curiosities, the mythological subjects of historical paintings turned into active moral and political agents in public discourse.[81]

In these representations, landscape anchored political fantasies. These in turn took hold of it, reshaped it, and adapted it to their needs. The countless historical landscapes exhibited in the festivals of the Revolution were first of all political landscapes, for they gave visual form to the project of a society based on the model of nature. Valenciennes's benevolent Athos inspired its viewers with the same sense of moral and social order as that evoked by the harmonious neoclassical facades of public buildings. "The irony is that Alexander, epitome of the ruthlessly autocratic monarch, had now become an icon of republican virtues for the delectation of supporters of the French Revolution."[82]

Almost a century later, Dinocratic Athos as a moralizing landscape of myth crossed the Atlantic. A Dinocratic representation reminiscent of Valenciennes's

template appeared in the 1904 edition of Jacob Abbott's *Alexander the Great,* a biography of the Macedonian king for children, originally published in 1849 (fig. 12). As in Valenciennes's painting, natural landscape was the true subject of the scene. Athos, a benign bearded rocky giant, was portrayed as a dream-like presence, as the shadow of a mountain located in the distant world of myth, and separated from the two figures in the foreground by water. This calm Arcadian landscape contrasted with the description of Athos the author offered to his young readers in his *Xerxes* (1902):

> Mount Athos is very celebrated in ancient history. It extended along the promontory for many miles, and terminated abruptly in lofty cliffs and precipices toward the sea, where it was so high that its shadow . . . was thrown at sunset, across the water to the island of Lemnos, a distance of twenty leagues. It was a frightful specter in the eyes of the ancient navigators, when, as they came coasting along from the north in their frail galleys, on their voyages to Greece and Italy, they saw it frowning defiance to them as they came, with threatening clouds hanging upon its summit, and the surges and surf of the Aegean perpetually thundering upon its base below. To make this promontory more terrible, it was believed to be haunted of innumerable uncouth and misshapen monsters of the sea that lived by devouring the hapless seamen who were thrown upon the rocks from their wrecked vessels by the merciless tumult of the waves.[83]

Athos remained a mythical landmark in the geographical imagination of young Americans, but also as landscape "summoning" important moral teachings, as it had been since the times of Herodotus.

A high school teacher and minister of the Congregational Church, Jacob Abbott envisaged himself as a new Plutarch. Through his series of "Illustrated Histories" (1848–54) of great figures of the past (including Xerxes and Alexander), Abbott aimed at providing his young readership with moral and didactic examples which would inspire and guide their lives. The series was intended as a compendium to history textbooks in school, to surpass the "mechanical committing to memory of names, and dates, and phrases, which awaken no interest, communicate no ideas, and impart no useful knowledge to the mind."[84]

From the post-revolutionary French Salon, the image of Arcadian Alexander's Athos migrated into the classrooms of mid-nineteenth-century American

Fig. 12. Jacob Abbott, *Proposed Improvement of Mount Athos,* in *History of Alexander the Great,* by Abbott (1849; New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1899).

high schools, and thus into the geographical imagination of thousands of young American citizens. Abraham Lincoln himself declared his debt to Abbott "for about all his historical knowledge."[85]

Nineteenth-century Americans' enchantment with nature as a source of moral values is well known. In the late 1830s, while Abbott was writing his first works on religious education, painters like Thomas Cole were seeking to express God's majesty through their sublime American sceneries, in which natural beauty was ultimately a symbol of morality. Mountains fascinated Abbott, himself a teacher of geography and natural sciences. Drawings of verdant peaks and valleys usually traversed by a river opened each chapter of Abbott's famous *The Teacher.* These images had no direct connection to the chapter contents. They functioned rather as moral icons, serving as physical reminders of the ethical mission of the teacher. Abbott's Dinocratic Athos was most likely inspired by the author's physical environment. Like Valenciennes's representation, it remained an ideal landscape, a democratic myth.[86]

For more than two millennia, the Dinocratic myth remained an evocative topographic myth, and in the last two centuries it underwent a progressive "disembodiment." But in the summer of 2002, the myth experienced another

"political resurrection," making headlines in the international press. At a time when Greek national pride was still smarting over the "question of Macedonia," a group of Greek Americans, led by the sculptor Anastasios Papadopoulos, launched their Dinocratic proposal: "to have a 240-foot likeness of Alexander carved into a craggy cliff north of the Chalkidikē peninsula—four times the size of the presidents of Mount Rushmore." Moved by a combination of patriotic and "universal" feelings, Papadopoulos and his supporters presented their project as a true mission to render justice and honor to the memory of the man who "brought Hellenism [and thus civilization] throughout the known world" and thereby proclaim Macedonia's Greekness on a colossal scale—once and for all.[87]

From Mount Kerdyllion, the cliff selected by Papadopoulos, the face of Alexander the Great was to gaze out from the Aegean Sea toward the Macedonian king's conquests. His colossal features were in turn to be seen as far away as the Strymonikos Gulf. Oddly, Alexander the Great was to be exalted by the same vision he refused—a vision to be fulfilled by Greek American civilization." The Alexander Mountain was to be complemented by a museum, an amphitheater, and a parking lot. According to the mayor of the nearby resort town of Aghios Geōrghios, at completion, it would attract "thousands of tourists from around the world," thus giving new impetus to the declining tourist industry of the area. At the same time, it would serve as "as the final stamp of authenticity for the Greekness of Alexander."[88]

Papadopoulos's Dinocratic vision did not go uncontested. Environmental groups threatened legal action to protect the pine-covered region from being turned into a theme park, whereas indignant Greek archaeologists and conservationists defined the project as a monstrosity—"the quintessential example of what Greek tradition is not about: big." Other opponents evoked the specter of a Cold War–like "rush to the biggest Alexander Mountain," a nonsensical "titanic competition"—"should the neighbouring country decide to start a similar project, where would that lead?"[89]

While nothing came of it, the Alexander Mountain project remained a powerful political statement, as well as a testimony to the power that landscape myths continue to exercise—as with the Dinocratic myth and most of its Western representations. The story of Dinocrates says much about the flexibility of meaning attached to circulating landscapes. It speaks of a *metaphysical* body of Athos appropriated in very diverse contexts and adapted to different circumstances. It also speaks of a *physical* body of Athos, and once again testifies that

its natural elements and physical prominence represent the starting points for any kind of appropriation and symbolic use.

On Athos itself, the figure of Alexander the Great remains an uncanny presence: not in the rock of the mountain's mighty peak, but in small details embedded in the walls of its Byzantine monasteries—details which usually go unnoticed to pilgrims and visitors. Among the stones of the *katholikón* of Docheiariou Monastery, a Byzantine bas-relief features the Macedonian king as he ascends to heaven in a vehicle drawn by griffins lured upward with a bait of meat. An expression of marvel and force and a popular motif in Byzantine art, Alexander's Flight anticipated Christ's Ascension. It served as an effective term of comparison to show human weakness: Alexander ascended to the heavens transitorily and artificially; by contrast, Christ ascended without external aids and for eternity. Having defeated Apollo and the Macedonian king, Christ was to shine forth as the "true light" on Mount Athos.[90]

2

UTOPIAN ATHOS

Edens and utopias are spaces of desire. They stand for different things and come in different forms. Terrestrial paradises represent the "no longer"; utopias the "not yet." Eden is a place that stands for what has been lost to corrupted mankind; utopia is a non-place for rational redemption. Biblical Eden was a God-ordained verdant garden; Renaissance utopias were man-made ideal cities. Surrounded by oceans or deserts, encircled by walls of stone or fire, utopias and Edens have traditionally come in a self-enclosed cartographic form—as "islands of the mind," to borrow the phrase from John Gillis; as islands of all sorts: existing and nonexisting islands; invisible islands in the Atlantic, anticipating Renaissance discoveries; green Edenic islands in the arid Mesopotamian desert longed for by early pilgrims and saints; urban islands in the mainland of ancient Greece; or again, monastic islands separated from the rest of the world by high brick walls.[1]

Islands, it has been observed, are central features in the Western geographical imagination. They are liminal places and metaphors of the mind. They are objects for contemplation, but also instruments for knowledge-making. They are the favorite sites for loss and recovery, for visions of the past and of the future. "Like the past, islands seem apart from the everyday present."[2]

Islands are reassuring in that they present us with the well-defined boundaries of their coastline. Like mountains and other geographical features, islands

just *are*. But islands can also be carved out of territory by human action and imagination. Cut off from the mainland by Xerxes, Mount Athos was one of these islands. While this canal had long since disappeared by the time the first Christian hermits landed on the Athonite shores, through the centuries, Christian Athos became an island conflating Edenic and utopian visions; an island of spiritual desire transcending, like Alexander's mountain, its physical boundaries. Physically "domesticated" by the early founders of the great monasteries, in the fourteenth century the Athonite peninsula was envisaged as a secure natural fortress, as a gardened island. This image floated in the late Byzantine and Western Renaissance geographical imaginations through rhetorical descriptions and cartographic representations. In so doing, it became an emblem, one that even inspired utopian projects.[3]

Byzantine Athos as a Garden

Gardening Early Christian Athos

Athos, a rebellious giant in Archaic Greece and likewise the site which inspired Xerxes' and Dinocrates' hubristic projects, was ironically to become an island of Christian virtue by the ninth century AD. While the first testimonies of monastic life on Athos date back only to this century, it is believed that the first Christian colonizers were already reaching the shores of the mountain-peninsula at least by the eighth century, seeking a place to conduct a quiet, solitary life, and possibly escaping iconoclastic persecution. Hence, from an abode of titanic pre-Christian myths, the mountain-peninsula gradually became the abode of humble Christian hermits. Athos's secluded wilderness, with its thick forests, steep ravines, and dark caves, presented the new colonizers with the ideal arena for their ascetic struggle.[4]

From the beginnings of its monastic history to the present, the Athonite fathers have continued to envisage the peninsula as a safe refuge—as an island geographically and spiritually removed from the outer world. In AD 859, Saint Euthymios the Younger, one of the earliest documented Christian settlers, moved from Bithynian Olympus (a holy mountain and main monastic center at that time) to Athos, "because he had heard of its tranquility." Monks subsequently gathered in the so-called *lavras*, or informal groups organized around a spiritual father on the ancient Palestinian model. It is from these groups that

the first examples of monasteries started to emerge on the peninsula. The oldest, Zygós, was established by John Kolobos, one of Saint Euthymios's disciples, northwest of the isthmus of Xerxes.[5]

By 881, Kolobos received a chrysobull from Emperor Basil I granting his foundation jurisdiction over the entire peninsula and its hermits. After Kolobos's death, a subsequent document proclaimed the Holy Mountain a place of monks, in which no laymen or farmers or cattle breeders were allowed to settle. Since then, grazing animals have been repeatedly banned on the peninsula. In the following decades, new monastic houses were established and continued to coexist with scattered hermitic dwellings. A central meeting point was also fixed at the center of the peninsula, the so-called *Mésē* (which was subsequently renamed Karyés). Here a council of representatives of the different communities met three times a year to discuss public administration matters. This council has continued to convene at Karyés up to the present time, gaining for Athos the title of the oldest existing democracy in the world.[6]

Early Athonite hermits dwelled in caves or huts made of twigs with straw roofs and survived mainly on natural forest products. The hermits' impact on the landscape was thus minimal. In the second half of the tenth century, however, dramatic changes started to occur. In 958, Saint Athanasius, who had been appointed to be the successor of the abbot of the famous Monastery of Kyminás in Bithynia and to serve as confessor to the emperor, retired to Athos as a hermit in order to escape these honors. His biographer wrote that when Athanasius arrived at the peninsula:

> He walked through the whole length and breadth of it; and seeing the host of ascetic solitaries on it and observing the harshness of their eremitical life and exposed life, he marveled and rejoiced and his soul was edified . . . for these good fathers neither cultivated the earth, nor were they entangled in possessions, nor were they distracted by bodily cares, nor did they own beasts of burden or asses or dogs, but had only grass huts where summer and winter they endured, scorched by the sun and frozen by the cold. . . . If, as often happened, someone anchored his ship somewhere on the Mountain, then they would receive from him corn or millet or some other kind of grain, and give fruit in exchange.[7]

Five years later, with the support of his friend and future emperor Nicephorus Phokás, Athanasius founded the Great Lavra, the first of the currently existing monasteries on the peninsula (fig. 13). Athanasius introduced a new model of

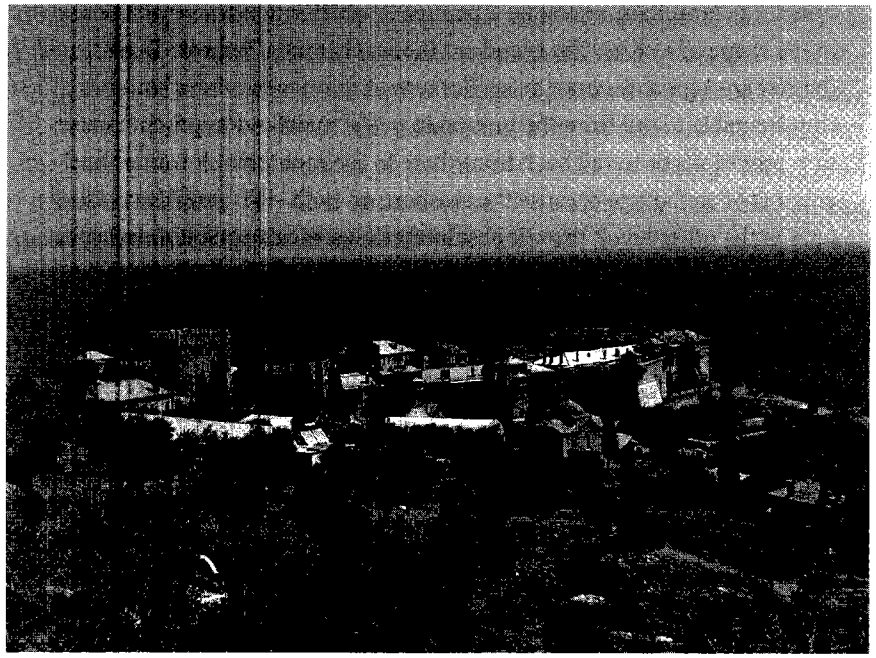


Fig. 13. Great Lavra. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

monasticism which followed the full coenobitic program as reformed by Saint Theodore the Stoudite (AD 759–826), who in turn aimed to recapture the rigors established by Saint Basil of Caesarea (AD 329?–379). This model rested on lack of private property, complete obedience to the abbot, and manual work. It also implied a relationship with territory radically different from that of the hermits: one destined to change Athos's landscape for centuries to come.[8]

When he set to cast the foundations of his Great Lavra, the first thing Athanasius did was "to cut down trees in the thick forest and to make level areas in the rough ground." Water for irrigation was conducted from a lofty site through a system of pipes and trenches running along the mountain's steep slopes for approximately 7.5 miles. The Great Lavra was built in proximity to Athos's southeastern point, one of the most desolate and least accessible locations on the peninsula. As the saint recorded in his *typikón,* or foundational charter (AD 973–975):[9]

> The seashore along the mountain was precipitous and without any harbors on both sides, to the north, that is, and to the south, for more than eighty

> miles. The mountain resembles a peninsula which extends toward the sea in the shape of a cross. The islands in the sea, Lemnos, Imbros, Thasos, and the rest are a great distance away. Because of this, when winter comes, a ship is unable to sail from the mountain to the mainland to procure necessary provisions or to sail back from there to the mountain. It cannot find any sort of anchorage because the seashore on both sides provides no shelter. On the other hand, there is absolutely no way for a person to transport his own provisions by dry land, partly because the road is so long, and partly because the mountain is practically impassable for pack animals. From the mainland to the tip of the mountain facing the rising sun, where the sea forms a deep gulf, and where the Lavra is built, is a distance, more or less, of a hundred miles.[10]

As Athanasius explained, he had deliberately selected such a remote and difficult site for spiritual purposes: to keep the monks "undistracted and free from external activities." A vineyard was planted in the vicinity of the monastery. Its primary purpose was to provide the wine for the Eucharist. "Even if I were to admit that some commercial activity could be carried on, although it is actually impossible," the saint commented, "I do regard it as dishonorable and out of place to dispatch monks to sell wine in the villages and cities, to spend a lot of time visiting with secular persons, to intermingle with them, to sojourn in their houses, and in this connection to converse freely with women and to make no effort to run from the filth and harm produced by such encounters."[11]

Athanasius envisioned the construction of his Lavra as a titanic struggle to tame wilderness—one that paralleled the ascetic's inner struggle to subdue the passions. "But how much hard work, the afflictions I suffered, the trials and hardships I endured, the expenditures I put out for quarrying of stone, excavating, heaping up earth, transporting stones, the rooting up, the cutting down, the removal of branches, bushes, and trees, in order to build the holy church of the most holy Mother of God, and setting the entire Lavra in place, to discuss all this in detail would take longer than the time at my disposal. It is enough that the Lord alone knows exactly what I mean," the saint recorded in his *typikón*.[12]

The foundation of the Great Lavra was followed by that of other monastic communities organized on the coenobitic model imported by Athanasius, such as the Monastery of Saint Nikēphóros (today Xēropotámou) on the western coast of the peninsula and the Monastery of Clementos, later the Monastery of Ivēron, on the eastern coast. Attracting an increasing number of monks from as far as Armenia and Italy, these foundations continued to coexist with the small groups of anchorites and hermits scattered across the peninsula. Athos's first charter (AD 972), a document containing a set of rules determining the organization and administration of the monks on Mount Athos, was signed by representatives of fifty-four monasteries, dependencies, and cells. At the time of Athanasius's death, about forty years after the foundation of the Lavra, the population of the peninsula exceeded three thousand monks. Thanks to Athanasius, his biographer wrote, "the whole mountain became a city."[13]

Coenobitic monks remained committed to hard physical labor. Through the cultivation of untamed areas of the peninsula, they reproduced monastic gardens on a large scale. These served as reserves of fruits, vegetables, and herbs for the monastic community, but also as places for work and meditation. Today, the results of this long gardening tradition are still visible in the terraced crops, the flourishing gardens, extensive vineyards, and olive groves of the various monasteries (fig. 14).[14]

Carving Eden out of a fierce landscape was understood as an act of domestication not only of nature, but also of the passions. Gardening was not simply a necessary source of living for the monks: it meant mapping a spiritual landscape on the physical one. The garden is defined by the boundary the planter traces between the cultivated land and the wilderness. Metaphorically, the primary act of gardening is that of fixing a line between known and unknown, rational

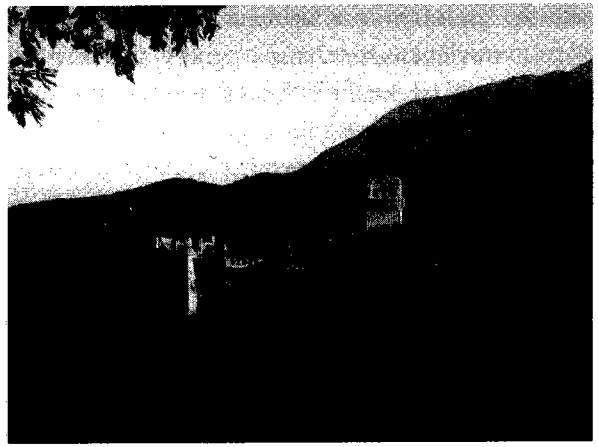


Fig. 14. Terraced cultivation at Karakállou. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

and irrational, good and evil. Since the Fall of Adam, the garden has constituted a moral space central to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In his homily XV on Canticles and in allusion to Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians 3:6–9, Gregory of Nyssa (AD 395), for example, compared the sinner to a wasted field, which through repentance could nevertheless once again turn into a garden cultivated by Christ: "The [true husbandman] is he who at the beginning in Paradise cultivated human nature, which the heavenly Father planted. But the wild boar [Psalm 80:13, from the forest] has ravaged our garden and spoiled the planting of God. That is why [the husbandman] has descended a second time to transform the desert into a garden, ornamenting it by planting virtues and making it flourish with the pure and divine stream of solicitous instruction by means of the word." Used by Septuagint translators to render Eden in the Old Testament, the ancient Greek word *parádeisos* originally designated an enclosed park. In ancient Greek literature, the historian Xenophon (431–355 BC) for the first time employed the term to indicate "a large well-watered field containing trees, flowers and animals, and surrounded by a wall": a well-defined "insular" space separated from the surrounding territory.[15]

The Byzantines had a long-standing fascination with pleasure gardens and, like some of their pious Latin contemporaries, with Eden itself. Three Mesopotamian monks managed to get as close as 20 miles to the gates of the Garden of Eden, a physical place believed to be situated "somewhere in the East." Byzantine emperors and nobles less eager to wander through the arid Mesopotamian desert had their own personal paradises built at home in Constantinople, in accordance with the latest trends of fashions and their own tastes. Byzantine gardens varied from small plots to extensive parks embellished with fountains, canals, and exotic animals. Like the cultivations on Mount Athos, Byzantine gardens could also be terraced with the upper level still providing space for groves of trees that appear to be "suspended in the air," in the words of the eleventh-century polymath Psellos.[16]

For the early desert fathers and, as we have seen, their Athonite successors, the garden was nevertheless a space for ascetic struggle, rather than for aesthetic pleasure. The extreme arid environment of the Near East shaped the understanding of the garden as something that must be carved out of the wilderness and guarded from its depredations. Most of the early fathers of the desert used to tend small garden plots. Saint Antony the Great himself, the prototype of all hermits, raised his own grain in the desolate desert of the Upper Thebaid. Blending fact and metaphor, his *apolytíkion* (dismissal hymn)

exalts the saint's streams of tears which rendered "the barren desert fertile" and his deep sighs of sorrow, through which his "labors have borne fruit a hundred-fold." By the twelfth century, the garden (in the physical sense) had become an essential part of any Byzantine monastery. Archbishop Eustáthios of Thessalonica criticized hermits that "withdrew to mountains and, like the Cyclopes did not plow or plant anything."[17]

Athos as a *Locus Amoenus*

"Eden was a garden, not a forest." Athos is covered by a thick forest, but it is named *Perivóli tēs Panaghías*, the Garden of the Mother of God. According to the tradition narrated in the *Pátria,* when the Virgin, during her journey to Cyprus, was diverted to Athos by a sudden storm, she was overwhelmed by the beauty of the place. She thus fell on her knees and prayed to her Son to grant her the mountain-peninsula as her personal domain, despite the fact that its inhabitants were pagans. In response, a voice was heard saying: "let this place be your inheritance and your garden, a paradise and a haven of salvation for those seeking to be saved."[18]

Unlike *kēpos,* meaning also "garden," the word *perivóli* (from the verb *perivállō,* to surround) conveys the reassuring sense of enclosure produced by the wall that separates the gardened plot from the wilderness—the same sense evoked by the high walls protecting the monasteries from the perils and temptations of the outside world. An inheritance from the pagan world, in Greek antiquity *perívolos* was the wall that separated the sacred space of the sanctuary from profane space. Like its high-walled monastic precincts and pre-Christian temples, the Athonite peninsula is itself a circumscribed space. A wall, which was anciently preceded by Xerxes' Canal, marks Athos's northeastern boundary, whereas the coastline acts as a natural boundary on the three other sides. Athos's self-enclosed space is surrounded by a threatening open sea—a sea that can become quite stormy in winter and that caused the shipwreck of the Persian fleet and kept haunting Xerxes, a sea that had been infested by pirates for centuries.

Athos was the only major Byzantine monastic center in the Aegean world that survived the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor, the Latin Crusaders, and the Slavic advances in the Balkans practically untouched. As such, in the last century of the Byzantine Empire, it became a true island of Orthodoxy in more than a metaphorical sense. Its wilderness had become increasingly punctuated

with gardened "monastic islands," with nineteen of the twenty currently existing coenobitic foundations established and/or restored. Unlike in the accounts of the founding fathers, fourteenth-century Athos, however, was not narrated as an untamed arena for ascetic struggle against nature and for the carving of garden islands. It was narrated instead as one single island, as a large-scale, secure garden. Geographically, the peninsula was a space that presented visitors with a given, rather than a negotiable boundary. This was no longer the boundary line the monks set between cultivated and uncultivated land. It was a boundary marked by the coastline—the boundary which protected the peninsula from the perils of an uncertain world.[19]

In his *Life of Patriarch Athanasius,* Joseph Kalothétos, himself a monk from Esphigmenou Monastery, characterized Athos as "mainland among the islands, and island among the mainlands"; as a space the visitor could walk or sail around, finding shelters and ports along its perimeter; a space reassuringly protected by the secure monastic fortresses "encircled by walls, . . . disposed as to form a dance, or, as one might say, similar to armed soldiers drawn up around Athos, in order to repel incoming enemies and fight for those who are behind them, bestowing peace and quietness to the other small sacred dwellings" on the peninsula. "On the entire surface of the earth and among all its wonders," Kalothétos claimed, "Athos is the greatest. From the moment you see it and open your eyes wide and turn your gaze right and left, it displays its view to the spectator, delighting him for many hours and calling him forward with joy." Around the peninsula, the monk continued, "islands disposed as to form a dance, big and small, inhabited and uninhabited . . . almost rejoice for their service as guardians from pirate incursions. Because only this place among all the wonders of the earth does not come second."[20]

Kalothétos's concern about pirates was well justified. A few decades earlier, the peninsula had experienced the terrible attacks of the Catalans, a band of mercenaries initially hired by Emperor Andronicus Palaeologus II to counter the Turkish advance in Asia Minor, which had subsequently turned against the Byzantines. Andronicus, we read in Philotheos Kokkinos's *Life of Saint Savvas,* "feared for the fate of everyone, but above all he feared for magnificent Athos. . . . He immediately dispatched letters to the monks. He exhorted all the hermits scattered in every corner of the peninsula; he begged those who lived in unprotected monasteries . . . to move to the inexpugnable monasteries, to secure themselves in every way possible." But when the Catalans arrived, no monastery was spared. During their raids, churches were desecrated, precious works of art plundered, libraries and archives burned down. "The grief of Athos reaches up to the sky," the philologist and political theorist Thomas Magistros bitterly commented in one of his epistles.[21]

Despite the attacks by the Catalans and the continuous menace posed by pirates, fourteenth-century Athos not only endured, but underwent a phase of revival thanks to the support of Andronicus (who himself ended his life as a monk) and successively Stefan Dušan, the tsar of Serbia (1331–55). In this period, Athos acquired unique fame and attracted numerous monks from Constantinople, as well as the southern Slavic countries, the Middle East, and Thessalonica. This new wave of incoming monks included a number of influential figures, such as Saint Gregory of Sinai (1260s–1346), Cyprian of Kiev (d. 1408), and Saint Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), the famous theologian and later archbishop of Thessalonica. In his description, Kalothétos went as far as comparing the central role of Athos to that of "the eye in the body"—a claim echoed a few years later by Abbot Charitōn of Koutloumousiou, who defined the peninsula as "the eye of the Universe."[22]

In a chrysobull issued in 1312, Andronicus Palaeologus II defined the peninsula as "a second paradise, a starry sky, and the abode of all virtues." A few decades later, Nicephorus Gregorás, Andronicus's chronicler and *chartofylax,* described Athos as one of those real and imaginary pleasure gardens chanted of by his Byzantine and ancient predecessors. We find Athos in an *ékphrasis,* or rhetorical description, which opens his *Antirrhetiká* (and which is reproposed with slight changes in his *Rōmaikē Istoría*). Here Athos is portrayed as a self-sufficient agricultural institution molded on the example of the small, circumscribed, ideal polis devised by Plato (who had himself been familiar with Athos and the story of Xerxes' Canal).[23]

The Athos described by Gregorás was a true *locus amoenus,* a literary garden island in which the dramatic mountain peak found no place. The goal of Byzantine *ekphráseis* was in fact to make present not the actual picture, but the spiritual reality behind it. Like sacred icons, descriptions of real and imagined *loci amoeni* served as windows to other worlds, as tools for inner elevation. Anticipating, in a way, Western Renaissance utopias, Byzantine *ekphráseis* served as useful fictions for self-edification. Byzantine *loci amoeni* brought together the classical and Christian traditions. They were imbued with Edenic elements, but unlike Eden, they remained within the realm of possibility. Like the utopias of the ancient world, they were associated with "golden ages of the past that might yet be regenerated in the present."[24]

In Gregorás's *ékphrasis,* Athos's Edenic nature was a reflection of a perfect monastic life, and Athonite monastic life was in turn inspired by a gentle landscaped nature. Monastic virtues fused in a harmony of colors, scents, and sounds, "as if flowing out of a treasure house." An amiable mantle of varied woods and cultivated lands covered the peninsula during all the seasons: like biblical Eden and the Homeric garden of Alkinoos, Athos was blessed by eternal spring. It also bestowed every kind of food in abundance. In the early morning, its woods rejoiced with the music of the nightingale, "as if chanting and praising the Lord together with the monks, because they too have some divine *kithára* and psalter embedded in their chest." Little water streams flew "quietly and silently," in harmony with the monks' tranquil way of life, because, the author explained, "Mount Athos itself offers many occasions for inner quietness to those who desire to live a celestial life on earth."[25]

If the nature of the peninsula reflected the botanical totality of Eden, the perfect way of life of its inhabitants was that of a utopian community; a community that followed the virtuous "ancient Doric way," extraneous to commerce and slavery. It was an entirely male community "naturally" protected from the evils of the outer world thanks to the geography of the peninsula. Its quasi-insular, secluded nature granted Athos defense from multiple perils: in the first place, vicious gazes and distraction by women. Athos was a paradise in which one did not risk temptation, or "the ancient discussion with the snake," as Gregorás put it.[26]

Athos, the scholar explained, was "crowned all around by the sea. And this adds further charm, so that it is nearly an island, were it not for some narrow strip of land [that is, the isthmus]." This kind of spatiality granted Athos's dwellers the quietness necessary to come closer to perfection and to God. After all, on Western medieval *mappae mundi,* Eden itself was often represented as an island located in the extreme Far East and surrounded by the ocean. Mount Athos, Gregorás emphasized, seemed to naturally cast away every form of evil and mischief and attract "only goodness." Its geography imparted moral teachings. It had been doing so since antiquity, "not with lips and voice, but," he writes, "with some animate works, which, traversing oceans and lands, can spread the sermon of goodness everywhere."[27]

Subverting the chronology of the events, Gregorás maintained that by shipwrecking his fleet, Athos summoned Xerxes, "whose barbarian and arrogant morale meant to abuse nature and at the same time boast to have done things on geographical features never heard before." Athos thus humbled the Persian king "in front of the entire *oikouménē,* teaching him to behave more humanly. With this example, it also taught all the kings, generals and governors to reject unseasonable arrogance and behave more humbly. And so its nature made [Athos] a laboratory of every virtue since the beginning. It charms everybody with its love: not just those who managed to taste the sweet honey of quietness [*hēsychía*], but even those who happened to learn about its good things just from hearsay."[28]

Athos as a Utopia

Athos in Renaissance Island Books

In the fifteenth century, Gregorás's vision of a perfect insular monastic community traveled beyond the boundaries of the dying Byzantine Empire and was given graphic form. Athos became one of the most distinctive Aegean features represented in Western *isolarii,* or island books. It remained such until the late seventeenth century. Island books were visual catalogues that featured maps of different islands on each page. The maps were usually accompanied by notes about the island's history, geography, climate, economy, customs, antiquities, legends, and all kinds of "curiosities." Each island in the *isolario* was depicted in a distinctive shape, as a self-enclosed world all its own.[29]

Isolarii grew out of navigational experience in the Mediterranean, especially in the Aegean archipelago, among which islands Venetian and Genoese sailors competed with Byzantine and Arab fleets for their profitable trades. With its fragmented geography of islands and quasi-islands (or peninsulas), the Aegean constituted the obvious cradle of this genre. Like Homer's Odysseus, Italian captains and merchants hopped from island to island in a matter of days, sometimes even hours. Aegean islands came in all shapes and sizes, from the curious rock of Kaloyeros (literally "monk"), named after its only inhabitant, who used a special tackle to lower his boat into the sea, to the oblong island of Crete and its high summits.[30]

While they were initially confined to this region, *isolarii* subsequently started to encompass islands outside the archipelago and even outside the Mediterranean, including islands in the Indian Ocean mentioned by classical authors (like Taprobane/Ceylon), as well as newly discovered islands in the Caribbean and South Atlantic. Islands came to constitute geographical units onto which could be projected any of the diverse desires and fears that were being

generated within Western Europe itself. While their precise quantity was impossible to know, in the late seventeenth century the Venetian cosmographer Vincenzo Maria Coronelli wrote that "the whole Earth is divided into islands." The island book had thus become "a way of imagining the world."[31]

In Renaissance geographical descriptions, the island endured as a principal cognitive form, as well as a practical mnemonic tool. Its self-contained spatiality allowed the compiler to blend fact and legend, personal observation and hearsay, past and present; it gave textual coherence to the most disparate information. In particular, the Aegean islands offered the perfect chorographic scale, which emphasized the qualitative characteristics of the *locus*. Microcosms to be explored and described, islands in this sense constituted narrative containers and cabinets of wonders. Delimited by their coastline, islands were easy to grasp by the eye and imprint on the memory. They were basic narrative units held together like precious stones by the compiler's island-hopping journey, a journey reiterated by the reader as he leafed through the pages of the island book.[32]

Athos was not an island, but, thanks to its unique status, it continued to be conceptualized and narrated as such. In his *Liber insularum Archipelagi* (1420), the first island book and systematic antiquarian mapping of Greece, the Florentine priest Cristoforo Buondelmonti depicted Athos in a round, insular shape connected to the mainland through a neck of land—an iconography derived from Ptolemaic cartography and destined to become standard over the next couple of centuries (see fig. 15). The forefather of Greek antiquarianism, Buondelmonti wandered for sixteen years through the Aegean islands, where he discovered antiquities and purchased manuscripts. Besides spiritual motivations, it is conceivable that his sojourn on Athos had also been dictated by the peninsula's fame as one of the largest repositories of Byzantine manuscripts. It was, in fact, widely known that the monasteries on Athos were treasure troves of invaluable relics and precious manuscripts, both ecclesiastical and classical.[33]

An "unruly cartographic encyclopedia of the Greek islands with a special focus on their historical geography," Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum* contained notes and maps of no fewer than seventy-nine islands, and some prominent locations in the region, such as the Dardanelles, Constantinople, and Mount Athos (the last two rendered in insular shapes). Besides its libraries, Athos interested the Florentine priest for several other reasons. First of all, it was a most prominent landmark, which he estimated to be visible in the North Aegean for

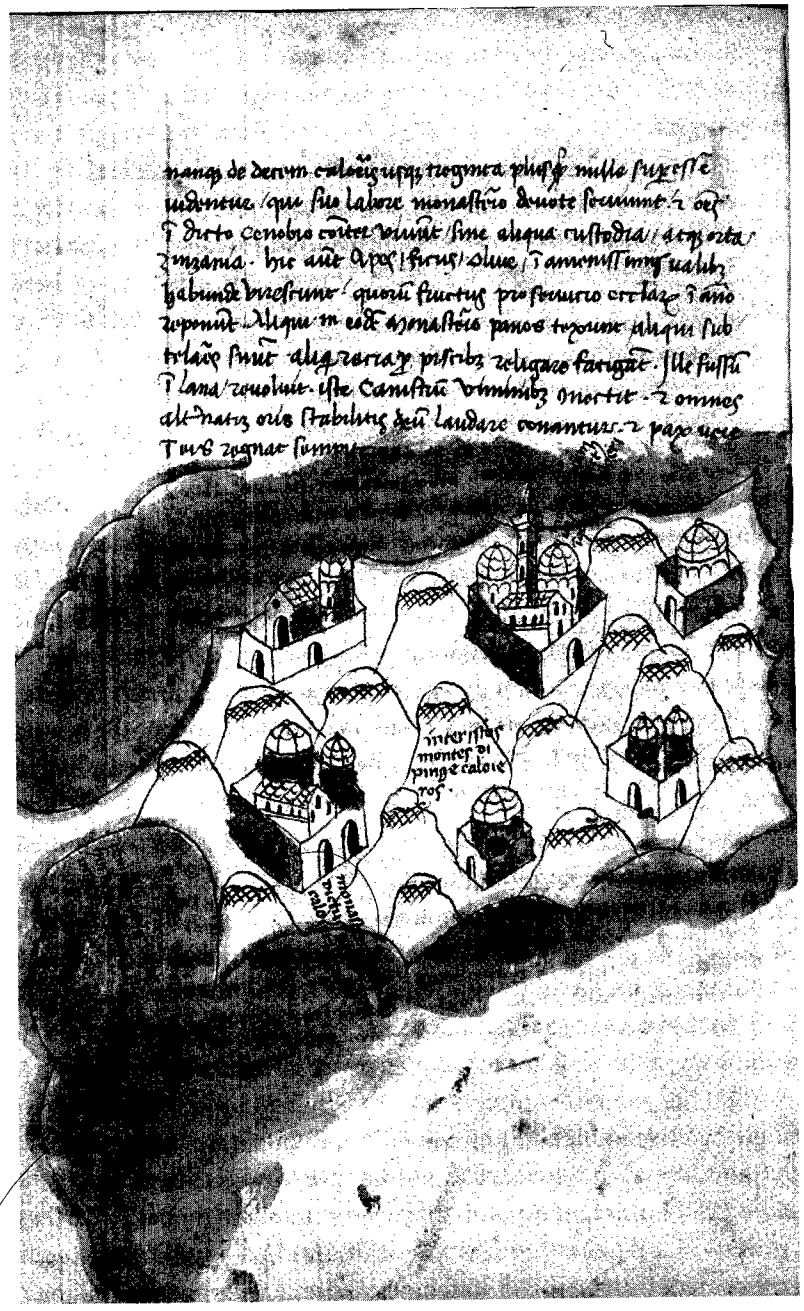


Fig. 15. Map of Mount Athos, in Cristoforo Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum Archipelagi*, Ravenna, 1422. (Istituzione Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna)

approximately 110 miles. Second, it was a site, like several of the Greek islands he visited, characterized by a compelling historical layering of contemporary "exotic" elements upon ancient (often mythical) narratives. Finally, as a famous monastic center, Athos was charged with a unique spiritual significance. All these elements found coherence in Athos's monadic insularity. They were contained within its coastline, which Buondelmonti's copyists represented in the typical portolan style, as scalloped embayments and angular headlands.[34]

At ease with Pliny, the Florentine priest knew that in antiquity on the summit of Athos there used to be "a fortified town whose inhabitants lived much longer than anyone else." Of course, having made Herodotus one of his guides, he also knew that, at the time of Xerxes, the Athonite peninsula "was crossed by the sea and was an island," as we read, in proximity to the isthmus, on the map in the Ravenna codex (fig. 15). The accompanying description opened with the story of Athos's short insular life: "After the aforesaid island [Thasos], we found the mountain, in bygone days called Athos, which, although adjacent to the continent, was, at the time of Xerxes king of the Persians, separated from the mainland." The memory of the canal that no longer existed reinforced the insularity of Athos and its distinctiveness.[35]

Athos's graphic quasi-insular rendering reflected and buttressed its late Byzantine idealization as a spiritual microcosm set apart from the rest of the world—a utopian island containing high-walled "monastic islands." Buondelmonti described the peninsula as "a palace of the angels" populated by coenobitic monks dwelling in "fortress-like monasteries," and by hermits, with their eyes "set towards heaven, sighing with all their soul at the thought of Paradise, the Eternal Motherland, from where they were banished due to the transgression of their first father, and with a contrite and humble heart, they move their lips to chant a hymn." On the Ravenna map, representations of Athos's two main monasteries were accompanied by demographic notes: Lavra's pious population was about one thousand, whereas Vatopedi's numbered five hundred.[36]

"Contemplative in his heart of hearts," the Florentine priest recorded, "the monk trains himself not to fear solitude because God is with him, but always to delight in looking at the sky without any worries about money." Like the citizens of Plato's ideal polis, the monks of Athos "lead a way of life just like those who are content with little and who have no desire for what the vast majority considers to be wealth. . . . Their life is truly peaceful and joyful, their nights are pleasant, their days busy, their meals quiet." As in Gregorás's *ékphrasis*, the Athos described by Buondelmonti was a perfumed landscaped garden-island

containing fig trees, olive trees, and numerous beehives. It was an Eden dominated by *hēsychía*, or spiritual quietness. "There is a good scent in the air and spiritual fervor prevails; modesty is the judge and the witness of [the monks'] morality. . . . At stated hours all the monks hasten to praise God in order to find the eternal peace which reigns among them."[37]

In the early 1490s, the German miniaturist Henricus Martellus, who was then working in Florence, took Buondelmonti's project further. He produced an *isolario* that contained a number of islands and peninsulas located well beyond the Aegean, the first of this genre before Columbus's discoveries. Martellus's *Insularium illustratum* was a true "island world atlas" which also included a Ptolemaic world map and a series of chorographic maps where the islands could be located by the reader. Martellus's *Insularium* was a lavishly illuminated book designed for a princely audience. In his islands, small color-coded icons of natural and human features acted as effective *loci memoriae*, or visual devices for the memorization of ancient and contemporary place-events.[38]

Like Buondelmonti's *Liber* and most early Renaissance island books, Martellus's *Insularium* featured not only islands, but also some famous capes and peninsulas. The combination of the two can be dated back to the original ancient Greek meaning of the word *nēsos*, which designates both islands and peninsulas. Unlike other peninsulas or capes, however, in most island books Mount Athos retained a special status as a separate and self-contained geographical entity.[39]

On Martellus's map, Athos's insularity was further accentuated by a squared frame (fig. 16). The isthmus turned into a thin neck of land precariously connecting Athos to the mainland. A vast gulf on the eastern coast imprinted the peninsula with a shape common to Ptolemaic maps and featured in several manuscripts of Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum*. Athos's peak, one of the main landmarks for sailors in the Aegean, became a marginal presence relegated in proximity of the isthmus. The mountain-peninsula was transformed into a flat Edenic garden traversed by rivers and punctuated with trees and high-walled monasteries. The six foundations on Buondelmonti's map were increased to sixteen. Martellus's map of Athos contained all the elements of a utopian island.[40]

Athos and Thomas More's Island of Utopia

Martellus's map was produced just a couple of decades before the first edition of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Some commentators have speculated that

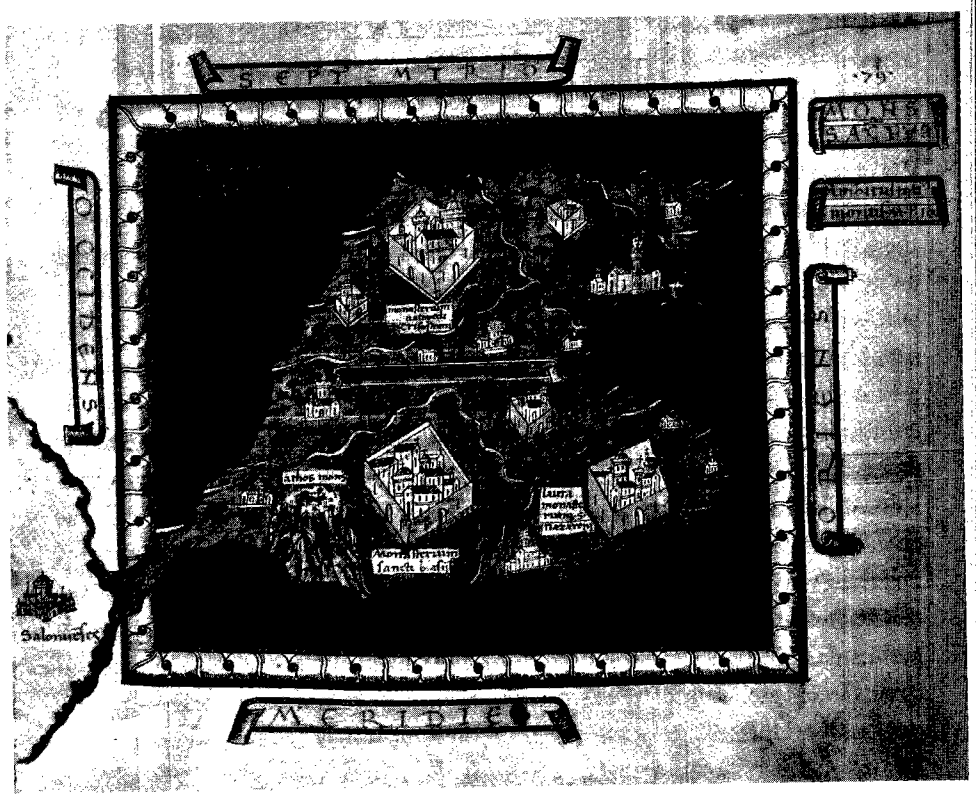


Fig. 16. Map of Mount Athos, in Henricus Martellus Germanus's *Insularium illustratum*, ca. 1480. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [Add. MS 15760, fol. 42r])

Athos, and perhaps this map, served as sources of inspiration for the British statesman. While any direct evidence for this claim is lacking, the two places and the tropes in which they are represented allow a series of compelling parallels and uncanny overlaps.[41]

Thomas More opened his book with a singular encounter. During a stay in Antwerp, he was introduced to the philosopher-traveler Raphael Hythloday. Having joined Amerigo Vespucci on his last voyages to the New World, Hythloday had ventured farther and found the island of Utopia (literally, "non-place"). The island was located off the coasts of South America, but its coordinates had thus far remained unknown in the West. More begged his charismatic interlocutor to describe the island in terms of soil, rivers, towns, people, manners, constitution, laws, etc.—in other words, to provide him with all the information one generally encounters in an island book. Similar to an

island book, More's account was also illustrated with a map, drawn by the artist Ambrosius Holbein for the benefit of the armchair traveler (fig. 17).[42]

Hythloday opened his narration with the same kind of description we usually expect to find at the beginning of an island book: "The island of Utopia is in the middle 200 miles broad, and holds almost at the same breadth over a great part of it; but it grows narrower toward both ends." Geographically, Utopia was thus bigger than Mount Athos, but had a similar shape, were we to trust Martellus's map. "[Utopia's] figure is not unlike a crescent: between its horns, the sea comes in eleven miles broad, and spreads itself into a great bay." As in the description of Athos by Joseph Kalothétos, Hythloday reported that "on the other side of the island there are likewise many harbors; and the coast is so fortified, both by nature and art, that a small number of men can hinder the descent of a great army."[43]

Furthermore, like Athos, cut by Xerxes from the mainland, Utopia was also an artificial island. "They report (and there remain good marks of it to make it credible) that this was no island at first, but a part of the continent. King Utopus that conquered it . . . brought the rude and uncivilized inhabitants into such a good government, and to that measure of politeness, that they now far excel all the rest of mankind; having soon subdued them, he designed to separate them from the continent, and to bring the sea quite round them. To accomplish this, he ordered a deep channel to be dug fifteen miles long."[44]

Like Xerxes, Utopus employed a vast number of workers and brought the canal to a speedy conclusion. But while Xerxes' Canal was soon despised by classical authors as a symbol of barbaric foolishness and excess, Utopus's Canal was looked upon by his neighbors with "admiration and terror." While the memory of Athos's temporary insularity was made visible only through maps, that of Utopia's peninsular origins was still visible on its territory. More was an experienced classicist well familiar with the story of Xerxes. A few years before the publication of *Utopia*, he had collaborated with Erasmus of Rotterdam on a Latin translation of the works of Lucian, which were published in Paris in 1506.[45]

In his account, Hythloday reported the presence of fifty-four cities on the island of Utopia—fifty-four like the representatives of the monasteries, dependencies, and cells that signed Athos's first charter in 972. Utopia's cities were "all large and well built: the manners, customs, and laws of which are the same, and they are all contrived as near in the same manner as the ground on which they stand will allow." Just like the monasteries of Athos, they were "compassed

Fig. 17. Ambrosius Holbein, Map of the island of Utopia, 1516. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [C.27.b.30])

with a high and thick wall, in which there are many towers and forts and are so like one another, except where the situation makes some difference." Mount Athos and Utopia also shared institutional similarities. Every year on June 1, a council formed by representatives from five different monasteries is elected in Athos's administrative capital, the village of Karyés located at the center of the peninsula. This council has been meeting to discuss public administration matters for more than one thousand years. Similarly, on Utopia, Hythloday explained to More, "every city sends three of its wisest Senators once a year to Amaurot, to consult about their common concerns; for that is the chief town of the island, being situated near the centre of it, so that it is the most convenient place for their assemblies."[46]

Like the Athonite monks and the inhabitants of Plato's ideal polis (to which More refers in several passages), the Utopians lived off of agriculture. We are informed that "they cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers in them; and all is so well ordered, and so finely kept." But the Utopians were also highly literate people. They read Plutarch and Lucian, whose writings were available in thousands of copies on the island. Had they been familiar with more authors, they would have probably turned Utopia into a library hosting a literary collection no smaller than the one formed by Athos's monastic libraries.[47]

Like the Athonite monks, the Utopians abhorred fowling and gaming as foolish occupations, and they wore "the same sort of clothes without any other distinction. . . . Their fashion never alters and it is calculated both for their summers and winters." The main similarity between the Athonite and Utopian communities, however, was the lack of private property imposed by the coenobitic rule imported by Saint Athanasius, but also, more generally speaking, the lack of desire for money, which, according to More, was the main cause of anxiety and mischief in any society.[48]

Whether Athos was a direct predecessor of Utopia, we cannot know. Apart from knowing that More was familiar with the story of Xerxes' Canal and the striking parallels between the two communities, we do not have proof that More constructed his nonexistent island based on an existing peninsula. More's fascination with monastic life is nevertheless well documented. We know, for example, that before turning to politics, he lived in the Catholic Monastery of Karthauser in Germany from 1499 to 1503. And maybe it is not by pure chance that Raphael Hythloday lived on Utopia about the same amount of time. More's personal monastic experience certainly impacted *Utopia*'s ideal communalism.

Fig. 18. Ambrosius Holbein, Map of the island of Utopia, 1518. Modified by Malcolm Bishop to highlight memento mori, 2005. (Courtesy of Malcolm Bishop)

Generally speaking, More's project (like Erasmus's) rested on a reappraisal of the Bible and the Church Fathers in light of the Greek classics—all traditions that were present on Athos.[49]

While purely speculative, comparisons between Martellus's map of Athos and Holbein's two maps of Utopia are also tempting. Evánghelos Livierátos, for example, has looked at the disposition of the cities and the monasteries on both maps. He has even suggested a possible identification of the tower on the eastern side of Utopia in the map's second edition (1518; fig. 18) with the tower of the Amalfitans, the remains of a Catholic monastery on the Athonite peninsula which functioned between the tenth and twelfth century. Utopia and Athos, however, are connected by ties more subtle than topographic details.[50]

At the moment of his tonsure, a monk dies to the world. The life of an Athonite monk rests on the continuous remembrance of death. "*Ean pethánеis prin na pethánеis den tha pethánеis ótan tha pethánеis:* if you die before you die you will not die when you die," goes a popular motto on the peninsula. By confining himself within the monastic walls and within the closed perimeter of Mount Athos, by turning his soul to Life Eternal, a monk also realizes the vanity and the foolishness of mundane affairs. Raphael Hythloday came to the same realization through his encounter with the Utopians, away from the familiar world of western Europe: "If you had been in Utopia with me, and had seen their laws and rules, as I did, for the space of five years, in which I lived among them; and during which time I was so delighted with them, that indeed I should never have left them, if it had not been to make the discovery of that new world to the Europeans; you would then confess that you had never seen a people so well constituted as they." The journey to a distant non-place allowed the traveler-philosopher to stand at a distance from the world in the best neo-Stoic tradition. The island of Utopia itself became an uncanny memento mori.[51]

According to Malcolm Bishop, Erasmus of Rotterdam, who oversaw the first edition of More's *Utopia* and worked with Holbein, ordered the artist to rework the original map for *Utopia*'s 1518 second edition, after envisioning a possible skull within it. The remembrance of death was concealed behind the island of Utopia, but also behind the name of its author: Morus, in the genitive "Mori." So by remembering death (memento mori), one would also remember Thomas More. Bishop has linked this map to other anamorphic representations, such as those produced fifty years later by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, in which human heads were hidden behind *nature morte*. But Holbein's

map might also be located within a broader neo-Stoic Renaissance mapping tradition; a tradition in which cartographic representations acted not only as mnemonic devices, but also as moral emblems; as images representing a visible thing and at the same time also something different from it; as "objects of contemplation through the assistance of which the individual could rise above the mundane in order to observe the theater of the world."[52]

In the 1518 version of the map of Utopia, the meditative quality of the skull-island was reinforced by the presence of Hythloday. Holbein depicted the philosopher-traveler in the left corner of the map as he described the island to another person. This could have been More, as well as any reader of *Utopia.* Through his didactic gesture, Raphael Hythloday, whose first name alluded to the archangel Raphael (the purveyor of truth) and whose surname in Greek meant "dispenser of nonsense," pointed at an invisible island made visible through his account and the map for the moral benefit of the reader. Utopia was a non-place (from the Greek *ou-tópos*), but in its Latinized form, it could have also been a "good place" (*eu-tópos*). While Utopia was a perfect society, as Hythloday seemed to suggest, it remained ultimately unreachable. Despite (or maybe thanks to) its impossibility, Utopia imparted important teachings and thus worked for the moral self-improvement of the reader.

Island books functioned in a similar way. While the islands they represented were generally, unlike Utopia, real places, for most readers they remained accessible only through the maps and descriptions provided in the *isolarii.* With their mix of ancient mythologies and contemporary tales made visible through geographical features, island books contributed to the self-edification of the armchair traveler—like *Utopia.* Cristoforo Buondelmonti, for example, sent his *Liber insularum Archipelagi* to Cardinal Orsini, so that he could "delight [his] mind when [he was] tired," as he explained in his dedicatory inscription. Among all the islands and quasi-islands of the Aegean, Mount Athos was a main stop where the armchair traveler could rest his mind, *as well as* his soul.[53]

Athos as a Cartographic Emblem

Renaissance maps worked as emblems on various scales: from the local scale of Holbein's *Utopia* to the global scale of Appian's and Oronce Fine's cordiform projections (1534 and 1539), whose heartlike shape invoked universal love and tolerance at a time of bloody religious conflict in Europe. Maps could also

become emblems of human foolishness, like the Ptolemaic map embedded in the famous *Fool's Cap* (1590), a cartographic curiosity probably no less disturbing than the skull hidden behind Utopia. Remembrance of death, human foolishness, and global tolerance were recurrent themes that were linked to one another in Renaissance neo-Stoic thought.

Remembrance of death encouraged a cartographic distancing from the world and self-reflection. Self-reflection, in turn, led to moral self-improvement. Faced with a skull, the gaze of the observer wandered through its empty orbs, through a universe of emptiness in which all that is materially worthy on earth became vain, meaningless. On the Ptolemaic world map embedded in the *Fool's Cap* by an anonymous artist, a senseless world was reflected back to the viewer: a world of wars, a world of greedy desire and thirst for power, a world far removed from the perfect societies of Utopia and Mount Athos. "*Nosce te ipsum,*" the joker seemed to say—know thyself; know thy foolishness, poor mortal.

Like these maps, Athos itself became an emblem. Unlike Utopia, it became an emblem that could be located on Western maps, and unlike the *Fool's Cap,* one that often claimed practical over meditative purposes. For example, in the island book by the Venetian captain Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti (1485), it became the head of a figure resembling a monk bent in prayer (the peninsulas of Sithōnía and Kassándra being the arms; fig. 19). The sanctity of the peninsula, "filled with monasteries in every corner," and the piety of the monks were reiterated in the accompanying verses:

> It is about sixty miles west
> [the distance] from [the island of] Stalimene to the Holy Mountain
> anciently called Athos:
> loftiest, wholly most pious
> scattered with monasteries in every corner
> full of monks who continuously pray to God sighing that He covers them with His mantle.[54]

The mention of the ancient name of the mountain (at that time commonly referred to by Italians as Monte Santo) and the image of the monks "praying with sighs" were probably derived from Buondelmonti's description, on which Bartolommeo's *Isolario* was largely based. This Bartolommeo defined as a "*periplus nisson*" (*periplus* of the islands). As anticipated by the author's pseudonym (dalli Sonetti), the text that accompanied the forty-nine maps in

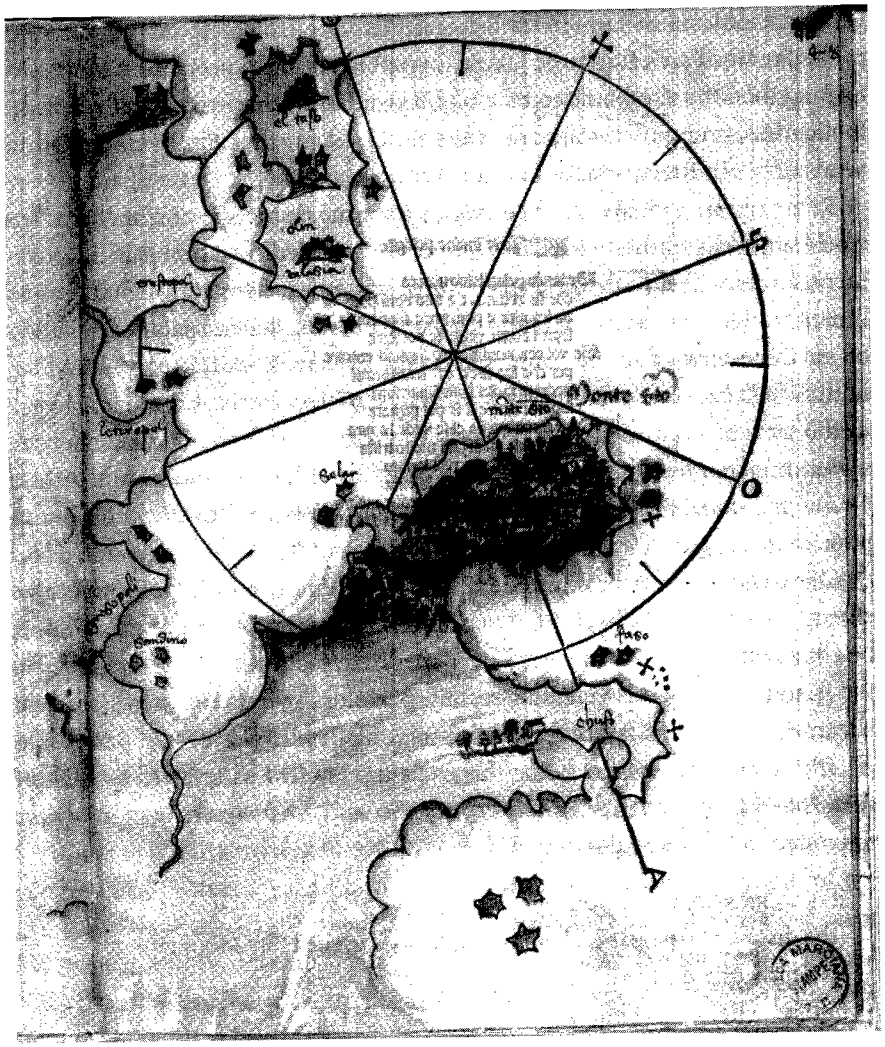


Fig. 19. Map of Mount Athos, in Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti's *Isolario,* Venice, 1485. (Biblioteca Marciana di Venezia [Inc. 733, fol. 48])

his book was unusually composed in rhyming couplets. Bartolommeo's *Isolario* retained through its poetic format and philological project a humanist interest in the locations and landscapes of Greek antiquity. Unlike Buondelmonti's *Liber,* however, it was explicitly conceived for navigational purposes.[55]

The Venetian sailor claimed to have made no fewer than eighteen journeys to the Aegean, calculating, he argued, the precise location of the islands on the

map, for he had "seen them one by one with his own eyes" and "put his foot down on them." Fusing geography with poetry and classical erudition with practical information, on the map, Bartolommeo alerted the sailor to shallow waters and dangerous reefs, which he marked as crosses. A compass rose helped orient the reader and at the same time resembled a sort of halo around the head of the "praying monk."[56]

Dalli Sonetti's *Isolario* was the first printed island book. Its forty-nine woodcut maps remained fields open to intervention. Their plain black outlines on white paper invited the reader to fill them in with colors, with topographical names and features, with corrections based on the personal experience of readers that had themselves personally visited those places, or of armchair travelers equally well traveled in the classics. In this way, an interactive dialogue between Bartolommeo's *Isolario* and the reader took shape. Boasting of firsthand experience of both the Aegean and the classics, Giovanni di Domenico Bembo, the Venetian rector of the islands of Skiathos and Skopelos, filled his copy of the *Isolario* with all sorts of practical and erudite annotations. On the neck of Mount Athos, the patrician classicist traveler marked the "ditch Xerxes had dug and through which his armada sailed."[57]

Over the following two centuries, cartographic emblems and erudite references endured and perhaps even multiplied. In the late seventeenth century, Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, the official cosmographer of the Serenissima, turned island books from cosmographic collections or nautical guides into tools for political propaganda. Rather than instilling the remembrance of death or offering spiritual inspiration and/or advice on navigation, Coronelli was more concerned with celebrating Venetian victories over the Ottomans. And so, from a utopian quasi-island, and praying monk, in Coronelli's *Geographical Parallel of the Ancient with the Modern Archipelago* (1697), Athos was transformed into a giant cross helping Venice's lion chase the infidel Turk out of the Aegean (see fig. 20). This map introduced the more than 350 views of islands and ports contained in the *Isolario,* which occupied two tomes of the massive thirteen-volume *Atlante Veneto.*[58]

On Coronelli's map of the Aegean, the trident shape of the Chalkidikē Peninsula was completely reconfigured. The Peninsula of Kassándrá (the first of the three "fingers") nearly disappeared, whereas Sithōnía was reduced to a mere appendix of Athos. We read on the cruciform peninsula that "the Holy Mountain, or Aghion Oros, called Monastir by the Turks and Athos by Ptolemy is inhabited by monks who make it famous for the quantity and quality of their

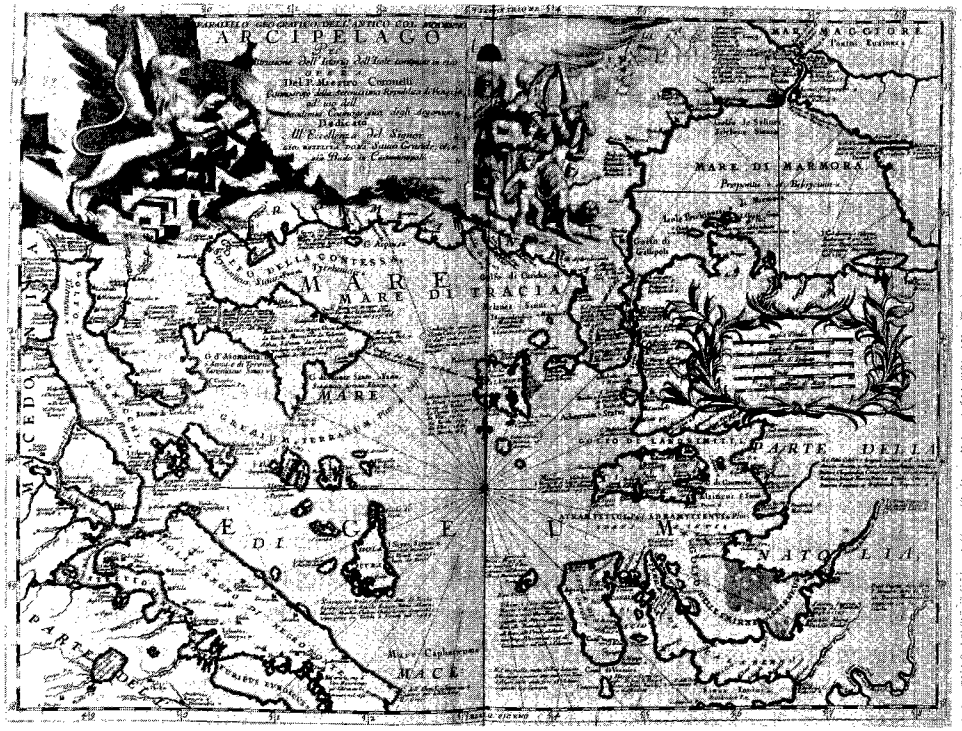


Fig. 20. Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Geographical Parallel of the Ancient with the Modern Archipelago,* Venice, 1697. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

monasteries." Coronelli's map, however, was more about non-presences than presences, of quotations rather than personal direct observations.

Ten years earlier, in the introduction to the English version of *Historical and Geographical Account of the Morea* (1687), the Venetian cosmographer had promised antiquarians and historians "entertainment in the melancholy-pleasing remains of past state of Glory, that were once the scenes of the greatest performances the mind of the man joined to active bodies is capable of, and reflect on the fate of human affairs subject all to Time and Chance." Ancient deeds provided precious sources for moral teachings, as well as powerful rhetorical devices for the exaltation of recent victories through historical parallels. Memories of ancient heroic deeds and myths crowded the Aegean, which had also been the theater of seven major Turco Venetian wars for more than the last two centuries.[59]

Coronelli represented Athos in a central and visually prominent position in the Aegean. The cruciform shape made it an emblem of Christianity (implicitly opposed to the "barbarous" Muslim Other). The Venetian cosmographer also stressed the peninsula's rare historical stratification through classical references. The history of Xerxes' Canal was not simply mentioned as in previous accounts and island books, but "mapped" back to the "year 3487 of the world." The presumed spot where the Persian fleet was shipwrecked was also mapped: "here Mardonius crashed with 100 vessels and lost 20,000 men in the year 3470 of the world." The famous shade of Mount Athos projecting onto the island of Lemnos, as reported by Apollonius Rhodius and Pliny the Elder, was similarly marked. The erudite reader was even provided with references to the original texts, such as "Pliny, book 4, chap. 10." Rather than tracing a "parallel" with the ancient world (as stated in the title), Coronelli's map conflated ancient and modern. It brought the classical past and the invisible back to life through their spatialization.

Even Xerxes' Canal, which had been simply mentioned by Buondelmonti and other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authors, here was clearly traced, along with the wall "that has been separating the peninsula from Macedonia." According to the Venetian engraver Marco Boschini, author of another famous *isolario* of the Aegean (1658), the canal had long disappeared as the consequence of a terrible earthquake. Today all one sees is a bilingual sign commemorating the non-presence of the canal. The wall separating the monks' holy territory from the rest of Macedonia, however, is still present (even though it has moved a few miles toward the interior since 1922). It is now constructed of concrete and topped by multilingual signs.

The double barrier drawn by Coronelli continues to grant Athos its Edenic insularity. Since the times of Coronelli, maps have gradually claimed to become less emblematic and more scientific. Even so, the non-presence of the canal has remained part of Athos's "official geography," and as such it continues to be commonly marked on topographic maps of the region. And not least: while physically connected to the mainland, today Athos is legally accessible only by sea—as if Xerxes had succeeded in his bold enterprise and created a Christian utopian island in spite of himself.[60]

3

ICONIC ATHOS

Aghion Oros (Holy Mountain) is an odd phrase. As an Athonite priest monk noted, it consists of two words: "One of them you can walk with your own feet—that is the Mountain. To the other you need to climb through prayer—that is holiness."[1] *Aghion Oros* embeds the same paradoxes and challenges as "sacred geography," itself another provocative phrase. It is provocative for it problematizes traditional binaries, such as the spiritual and the material, the invisible and the visible, the eternal and the contingent. While physically located in space, sacred places differ from their surrounding environment for they open "a window on the heavens."[2] They become channels of communication with the divine. Necessarily, they do so thanks to their being anchored to this world. Like the incarnated Christ, "geography delights the human psyche because of its localization of truth, its way of helping us grasp the abstract by way of the concrete."[3]

Holy places serve a similar function to that of sacred icons in Eastern Christianity: as images not completely separated from their referents, and thus as gateways to the divine.[4] The icon's flat surface is analogous to what Mircea Eliade envisaged in the threshold of a basilica: a boundary between two worlds. Yet, unlike earthly boundaries, rather than indicating a division or setting a limit, sacred icons exalt permeability; they invite penetration. There is a two-way traffic: the saints pass through the "window" of an icon to meet the viewer and vice versa. Icons and sacred places are thus points of passage. They lie in

between the concrete and the abstract, the objective and the subjective, the particular and the universal. They speak of the invisible through their visibility. They make a non-presence present through their own materiality. They make the ungraspable graspable through their spatial localization and finitude.[5]

As sacred places, mountains occupy a special position in Judeo-Christian tradition and Orthodox iconography. As in ancient Greece, they do so because of their physical geography. Pointing to heaven and yet anchored to this world, mountains represent obvious places for revelation—what Eliade named "*axes mundi.*" In the Old Testament, both Moses and Elijah encountered God on mountains in an absence of clarity. What was not given to see and know to the two prophets became manifest in the New Testament, on another lofty peak. On the summit of Mount Tabor, the Apostles Peter, James, and John saw the face of the Transfigured Christ shine "like the sun" and his clothes become "as white as the light." On Sinai, God had spoken to Moses "ἐν νεφέλῃ πυκνῇ," in a dense cloud of dark smoke. On Tabor, His voice was heard from within a "νεφέλη φωτεινή," a luminous cloud radiating Divine Grace.[6]

On Tabor, Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus, linking His Transfiguration to earlier mountain revelations. In Byzantine iconography, Tabor is thus split into three peaks: on the central and highest summit, Christ is enclosed in a *mandorla* of light; Elijah and Moses stand on the left and right peaks, which represent Mount Carmel and Mount Sinai, respectively (fig. 21). The one mountain is continually superimposed on the others. The entire life of Christ is itself suffused by the rocky element. In the pictorial cycles which decorate Orthodox churches, rock accompanies the Lord from His Nativity to His Resurrection as a visual narrative thread linking different scenes of His life. In the New Testament, mountains similarly serve as signposts marking different stations in Christ's ministry: from the Mount of Temptation to Tabor, from the Mount of Olives to Golgothá, and so on.[7]

Unlike these famous peaks, Athos is *not* a biblical mountain. It is not one of those mountains one expects to find on holy icons or pictorial cycles in churches. While local legends identify Athos with the "exceedingly high mountain" from which the devil tempted Jesus with the view of "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," *no* event reported in the Scriptures ever took place on the mountain-peninsula. And yet, ironically, today its fame in the Orthodox Christian world surpasses that of many biblical mountains and sites. Like Sinai, Athos is a primary destination for pilgrimage. Unlike other Byzantine holy mountains, such as Galésion and Kyminás, not only has Athos endured,

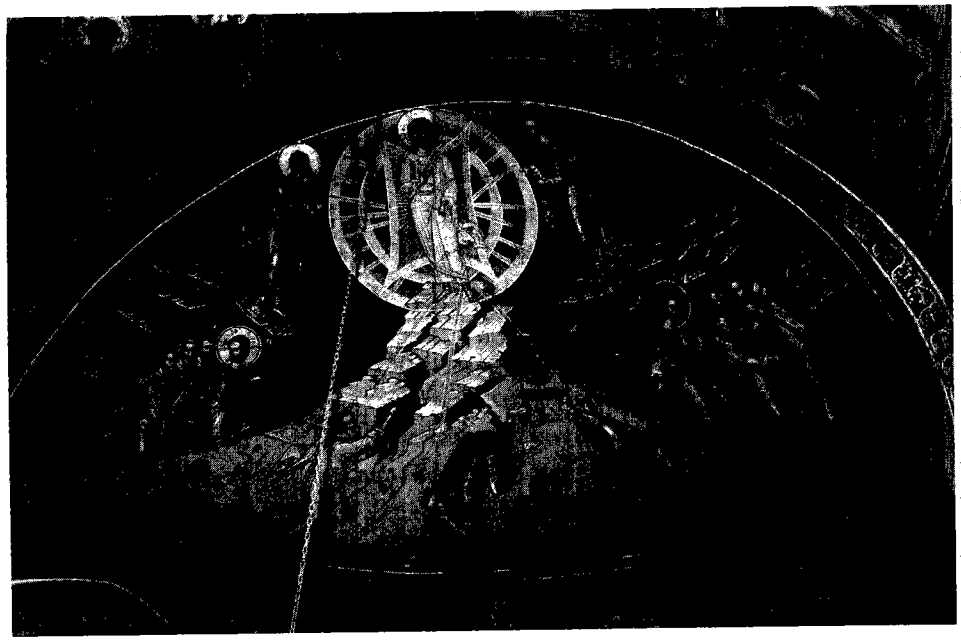


Fig. 21. *The Transfiguration of Christ.* Fresco in the *katholikón* of the Holy Monastery of Docheiariou, sixteenth century. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

but it has become *the* Holy Mountain par excellence. How did it become such? When did the remote Edenic island and celestial abode of monks become an "icon" systematically venerated by masses of pilgrims and *non*-pilgrims? The answer to these questions is to be sought, once again, in the physical geography of the mountain-peninsula, as well as in its post-Byzantine history. It is to be sought in the challenging times after the Fall of Constantinople, when Athos no longer enjoyed imperial financial support and the monks had to find new strategies to ensure the survival of their holy abode. They could only do so by spreading the fame of their Holy Mountain beyond its boundaries and those of the Ottoman Empire, of which it had become part.[8]

Athos as a Sacred Doorway

From Monks' Edenic Island to Pilgrims' Holy Mountain

> Spiritual are the paths that lead you to the Holy Mountain. Here the landscape, from the first contact, captures your senses. It invites and welcomes a spiritual conversation. Your dialogue will be—and could not be otherwise—a dialogue of holy and mystical union.—Rounē, "Aghion Oros"

As the pilgrim enters the *katholikón* of Docheiariou Monastery, on its threshold he is welcomed by an allegorical wall painting of a famous parable from Matthew's Gospel (fig. 22). He is also reminded of the difficult path undertaken by the fathers who physically passed through that gate and were tonsured inhabitants of the Holy Mountain. On the left side of the wall painting, the parable is given visual form: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it". On the right, Christ bestows His teaching: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." The hypocrites and those who choose the "wide gate" are transported to Hell on the boat located under the feet of Jesus and His Saints.[9]

The parables and their pictorial representation have a particular spiritual resonance for their robed viewers. At the moment of his tonsure, a monk consciously chooses to enter the narrow gate and climb the steep path to salvation. While intended as the illustration of an evangelic parable, the wall painting also maps out this path. It does so through an allegorical geography reminiscent of the physical Athos. The world is represented as a walled garden resembling Athos's monastic gardened islands. The arched "wide gate," outside of which the devil is waiting for his victims, is similar to the entrance of the *arsanádes,* or monasteries' landing places. Similarly, the dark waters of the river Acheron over which the newly departed souls are ferried into Hades could well be those of the Aegean. The ascetics who resist the evils of temptation and choose the narrow gate find themselves climbing a slope similar to a stylized profile of Athos's summit (as represented on engravings of the monasteries; see fig. 24). On the top of the Holy Mountain, surrounded by a Taborean cloud, the Lord welcomes ascetics who have safely made it to heaven.[10]

On this late-eighteenth-century fresco, Athos is no longer the Edenic island portrayed by late Byzantine authors. It is a mountain to be climbed and, metaphorically, a narrow gate to be entered. By the time the fresco was being painted, Mount Athos had become a visually prominent landmark in the Orthodox geographical imagination and an increasingly popular destination for pilgrims. For the past three centuries, the mountain-peninsula had been one of the three key nodes in Orthodox Christian sacred geography (with the Holy

Fig. 22. *The Wide Gate and the Narrow Gate.* Fresco at the entrance of the *katholikón* of the Holy Monastery of Docheiariou, 1783. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

Land and Mount Sinai). After the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, it was to these three foci that the eyes of the Orthodox world were turned.[11]

By the late eighteenth century, pilgrims to Athos were familiar with the peninsula and its sacred topographies even before leaving their homes. Conceived on the preexisting models of Sinai and the Holy Land, pilgrim's travel guides (*proskynētária*) and pictorial brochures of the peninsula had been available to them since the beginning of the century. But what was a pilgrim to nonbiblical Athos supposed to venerate? *Proskynētēs*, the Greek word for pilgrim, literally defines the one who bows down before an icon or some relics and venerates them. As René Gothóni pointed out, "while for the Western pilgrim the journey to the place and its hardships are crucial to his *peregrinatio*, for the Eastern pilgrim what does really matter is the act of worshipping at the shrine" (*proskynēsis*). Eighteenth-century pilgrims to Athos could drink of the water from the spring miraculously revealed by the Mother of God to Saint Athanasius; they could bow down before a number of precious relics donated by the Byzantine emperors to the monasteries; they could also venerate miraculous icons, which were said to have wondrously reached the peninsula during the period of iconoclastic persecution. Even before that, however, pilgrims bowed down before another icon: that of the mountain-peninsula itself.[12]

In the late fourteenth century, Joseph Kalothétos was already explaining to his readers how Athos's spatiality invited both movement and contemplation. Thanks to its dramatic visibility, Athos's pyramidal cone was an object of awe and wonder in itself; one, according to the Byzantine monk "surpassing all the wonders of the world." The phenomenon of the documented pilgrimage, in the sense of a systematic *proskynēsis*, however, began much later. It started, almost paradoxically, at a time of financial distress and instability.[13]

In 1423, after the Ottoman capture of Thessalonica, the monks of Athos, who foresaw the imminent Fall of Constantinople, submitted to the sultan. For about five hundred years, the peninsula preserved its relative autonomy and central administration in exchange for the regular payment of a fee to the Porte. In 1575, a Turkish *aga*, or governor, who resided in Karyés was introduced as the sultan's representative and was expected to ensure order with the assistance of a small garrison.[14]

Graham Speake offers an overall positive picture of the first century and a half of Ottoman occupation:

> Ottomans knew that the Athonite monasteries were amongst the richest and most powerful institutions in the ecclesiastical establishment of the empire they had now acquired. They were conscious of the high regard in which the monks were held in Byzantine society and of the extent to which the monasteries operated as centers of intellectual and spiritual excellence. An early violation had occurred in 1433, when Sultan Murad had laid hands on monasteries' ships and other property, but the monks managed to buy them back. After that, at least until the second half of the sixteenth century, the monks enjoyed the active support of successive sultans, who went out of their way to protect them from exploitation by officials and tax collectors and to preserve their independence. It has even been suggested that the Ottomans may have been in awe of the monks' supernatural powers and the efficacy of their prayers.[15]

The foundation of Stavronikēta, the latest of Athos's twenty monasteries, in 1541 and Sultan Selim I's financing of renovation works at Xēropotámou bear witness to this period of prosperity on Ottoman Athos. Over the following centuries, however, things changed. While Athos's special autonomous status continued to be granted by the Ottoman rulers, taxation often grew heavy and repeatedly drove many of the monasteries to the edge of bankruptcy.

The coenobitic program established by Saint Athanasius was challenged and

often gradually supplanted by the new and more individualistic idiorrhythmic rule, which allowed monks to prepare their own meals, retain possession of private property, receive remuneration for their labor, and thus indulge in commercial activities outside of the peninsula. While the idiorrhythmic rule openly attacked the communalistic aspects of the coenobion and was therefore criticized for its relaxation of moral and spiritual standards, it nevertheless helped the monasteries cope with the often difficult economic climate during the last three centuries of Ottoman rule.[16]

The survival of the monasteries, however, was due primarily to the generous financial support provided by the rulers of Orthodox countries, especially by the princes of the Danubian Principalities. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, these rulers competed to fund the restoration and the extension of the monasteries. They saw in the Athonite peninsula a symbol of true and uncorrupted Orthodox Christianity—a spiritual landmark in the Ottoman-dominated Balkans. For the princes, sponsoring Athos's holy foundations was not just a pious and noble act; it was a mission that elevated them to the status of the protectors of Orthodoxy itself.[17]

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Wallachia and Moldavia gradually came under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. As vassal tributary states of the Porte, they enjoyed complete internal autonomy as well as relative wealth, perhaps as a result of the grain trade. In exchange for a yearly tribute, internal politics were left to local princes confirmed by the sultan. No Muslims were permitted to settle in the principalities, nor were mosques allowed to be constructed on their territory.[18]

An intense cosmopolitan network developed in the seventeenth-century Balkans. Greek merchants were attracted by the large-scale export trade of the Danubian Principalities, Greek diplomats and scholars populated academies and courts, and Greek clerics flooded the lands. The Greek language practically supplanted Slavonic as the ecclesiastic language of the principalities. At the same time, Moldavian and Wallachian artists decorated the walls of Athonite refectories and churches, as precious artifacts found their way to the Holy Mountain. On the walls of the churches of Athos, portraits of benefactors appeared beside those of the saints, immortalizing them as true champions of Christianity for eternity.[19]

During the eighteenth century, the intensifying contacts between Athos and its Moldo-Wallachian benefactors contributed to a large increase in pilgrimage

to the peninsula, indeed to its gradual transformation into a systematized mass phenomenon. For Christian faithful within the Ottoman-dominated lands, Athos assumed a symbolic value: it became a beacon of Orthodoxy to which they could turn their eyes and souls. For the monks, pilgrimage represented an obvious way to attract donations for their impoverished foundations. The first and most famous Athos *proskynētárion,* however, was not the work of a monk, but of a physician.

In 1698, Iōannēs Komnēnós, the Greek private doctor and astrologist of the Wallachian Prince Constantine Brancovan, traveled to the Holy Mountain and on his return compiled a true pilgrim's travel guide. In 1701, the first edition was printed in Snagov, and within a few years the guide met with great success. Composed in verses like Bartolommeo's *Isolario,* the *proskynētárion* was intended as a moral compendium for Komnēnós's patron and for all the "pious Orthodox Christians." Easily transportable thanks to its small size, it was also a practical handbook—a "must have" for the prospective pilgrim.[20]

From the idealized *locus amoenus* celebrated by scholars and clerics in the last century of Byzantium, post-Byzantine Athos became a physical place, an ensemble of *proskynēmata,* or stations. While still "surpassing the Pyramids, the gardens of Alkinoos, and even the Elysian fields," unlike in fourteenth-century *ekphráseis,* the Athos described by Komnēnós was a place to move through quickly, rather than to contemplate: "Ὅποιος θέλει βουληθῇ, νὰ πᾷ νὰ προσκυνήσῃ / Τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος νὰ ἰδῇ καὶ νὰ τὸ τριγυρίσῃ / Ἂς διαβάσῃ τὸ παρὸν, ἔπειτα νὰ κινήσῃ." Like Bartolommeo's *Isolario,* Komnēnós's short rhymed verses facilitated the imprinting of specific sites in the non-visitor's memory. At the same time, they suggested rapid transitions between these "stations" to the future visitor. The pilgrim to Athos was to set off ideally in May and land at the Lavra. He was to venerate the icons and relics in the monastery, and then rapidly move on to all the other monasteries, dependencies, and cells, and do the same in each of them.[21]

According to Kalothétos, a visitor did not need to tour the whole peninsula and venerate all its treasures in order to be renewed in his soul and body; he could simply rest in "whatever monastery he ended up at" and enjoy the hospitality and spiritual assistance of its monks. For Grēgorás, nature itself assumed this healing role. But now, for Komnēnós, salvation was obtained through a restless horizontal and vertical march, rather than through static contemplation:[22]

So if you wish, do *ascend* Athos from there
otherwise get up early and *descend* to Lavra.
Walk fast, go to Kerasiá
[and] as you *climb up,* spend one night at Panaghiá.
Then quickly and piously, with toil and fasting
do *ascend* Athos with greatest eagerness
. . . . . .
then *descend* once again to Panaghiá.[23]

Landscape no longer infused its graces to the pilgrim simply by his being immersed in it. In the rapid succession of Komnēnós's verses, the Edenic island became a *klimax,* a ladder for physical and spiritual ascent. It became a liturgical space where the pilgrim performed a sort of procession, during which he stopped to venerate every icon. Spiritual elevation was attained by a movement through real space, and yet real space could not be separated from the spiritual topographies of the ladder (to which I will return later).

The Snagov edition of Komnēnós's *proskynētárion* was illustrated by the first Orthodox graphic representation of the Holy Mountain, an engraving which featured the two slopes of Athos and its monasteries (fig. 23). Athos was portrayed as a serene world in miniature standing on its own, one in which the reader could map the progress of Komnēnós's narrative itinerary. With its smooth geomorphic forms, Athos was the "*óros hēsychías,*" the "mountain of quietness" described in the opening verses. Komnēnós achieved such spiritual quietness through his pilgrimage to Athos and sought to transmit it to Prince Brancovan and his pious readers at a difficult time for the principalities.

As Komnēnós was compiling the *proskynētárion,* political pressure exercised on the prince by the powerful boyars, the members of feudal aristocracy, was increasing. Ottomans too had been intensifying their demands. Wallachia was to eventually lose its relative external independence. Komnēnós's patron was the last ruling prince of Wallachia. His life ended in tragedy as he watched the execution of his family before he himself was beheaded in Istanbul in 1714. This resulted from his unsuccessful attempt to negotiate anti-Ottoman alliances, first with the Habsburgs, and then with Peter the Great. In 1992, the Romanian Orthodox Church canonized Brancovan and his four sons, as they had refused to abandon the Christian faith for Islam. The "Right-Believing *Voivode*" was never able to physically visit "the mountain of quietness," but he did travel there—imaginatively, through the pages of his physician's *proskynētárion.*[24]

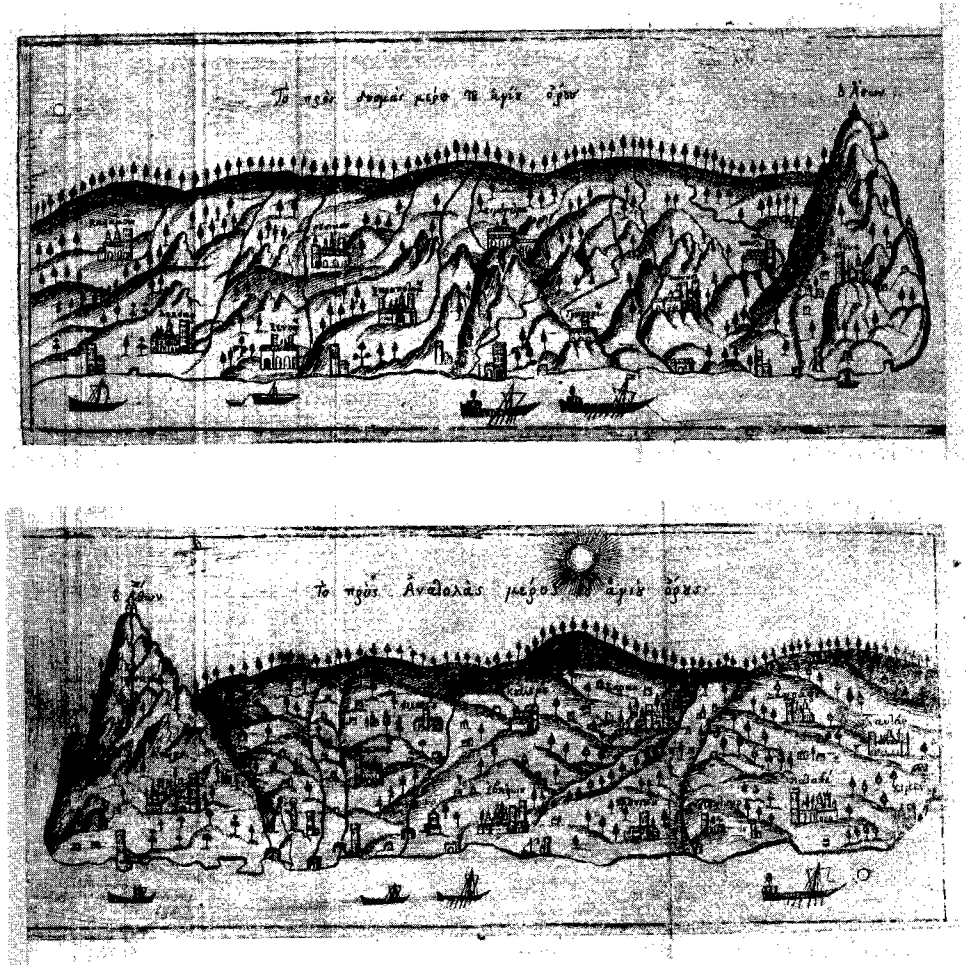


Fig. 23. The slopes of Athos in Komnēnos's *proskynētárion,* 1701. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [868.d.9.G.7300])

Athos as a Spiritual Door on "Sacred Brochures"

In the eighteenth century, pilgrims did not simply go to Mount Athos on their own initiative. They were encouraged to do so by the monks themselves. A few years after the publication of Komnēnós's *proskynētárion,* the Athonite fathers devised their own pilgrimage "advertising brochures." Engravings of the peninsula, its monasteries, their saints and miraculous icons were commissioned by the monks from famous typographic centers traditionally linked to large

Fig. 24. *General View of Docheiariou Monastery,* Venice, 1819. Holy Monastery of Docheiariou, Mount Athos. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

Greek communities, in cities like Venice and Vienna. Easily portable in an age of primitive travel, these sacred engravings were carried by the monks on their alms-begging missions to the Danubian Principalities and were bestowed to potential benefactors and pilgrims as blessings.[25]

During these missions, the monks took wonder-working icons and precious relics from Athos on procession out of the peninsula, offered spiritual support to local people, and sought to promote pilgrimage and raise funds for their religious foundations. Engravings featuring detailed plans of their own monasteries surrounded by saints and miracles enabled benefactors to conjure up a monastic foundation in their mind's eye (fig. 24). The engravings served as effective visual aids to illustrate the monks' tales, that is, as "visual pedigrees" of the monasteries. Other engravings featuring general views of Mount Athos allowed prospective pilgrims to undertake a short visual "pre-pilgrimage" within the engraving's surface (fig. 25). These engravings, however, also conveyed deeply mystical meanings. They mapped out a spiritual journey, a divine ascent, not just a physical place. They enabled the faithful to visualize the contours of a place few of them would get to see in person.[26]

General views of Athos drew on preexisting geographies and materials, such as similar brochures of Sinai which had been commissioned by the monks of Saint Catherine's Monastery since the seventeenth century. Of course, they also drew on Komnēnós's *proskynētárion,* the most accessible source of information about the Holy Mountain in early-eighteenth-century Europe. Original verses from the *proskynētárion* usually accompanied the views of Athos, which were in turn based on the engraving in its Snagov edition. The two slopes of the peninsula were rotated and placed in front of one another in order to form a spectacular 360° view of a gate to Life Eternal.[27]

The first of these views was produced in Venice in 1707 (fig. 25). The engraver Alessandro dalla Via transposed the familiar biblical topography of Sinai onto nonbiblical Athos. He literally transformed the latter into a "new Sinai" and into a ladder to heaven (fig. 26). The 3,750 steps of Mount Sinai's Stairway of Repentance guided pilgrims to the chapel located on its summit. On the Athos engraving, a torrent descended from the top of the mountain into the sea. Resembling steps more than banks, its rocks seemed to suggest a second Stairway of Repentance.[28]

At the foot of Sinai, infidel Turks attempted to assault the highest walls of the Monastery of Saint Catherine. In the troubled waters of the Aegean, pirate

Fig. 25. Alessandro dalla Via, *General View of Mount Athos,* Venice, 1707. (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

vessels and sea monsters surrounded the Holy Mountain no less threateningly. On the top of Sinai, the divine cloud revealed the crucified Christ. Above Athos's slopes, standing on clouds, were the enthroned Christ Pantokratōr, the "Ruler of All Things," and the benevolent Mother of God: the patroness of the peninsula watching over her garden, and the Life-giving Fount (*Zōdóchos Pēgē*) bestowing the Water of Life to the world.

This vertical pattern would have been familiar to the Orthodox faithful from sacred icons, in particular those of Saint John's *Ladder of Divine Ascent.* This was a famous seventh-century theological treatise in which the abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery compared "the way to Paradise" to a ladder, whose rungs corresponded to different virtues. The faithful who ascended the ladder moved "from the terrestrial realm to the divine realm." The treatise became an instant "best-seller" among Christian ascetics and offered a no less compelling subject to Byzantine icon painters. Dalla Via, who moved among intellectual circles of Greek émigrés, was certainly familiar with the sophisticated post-

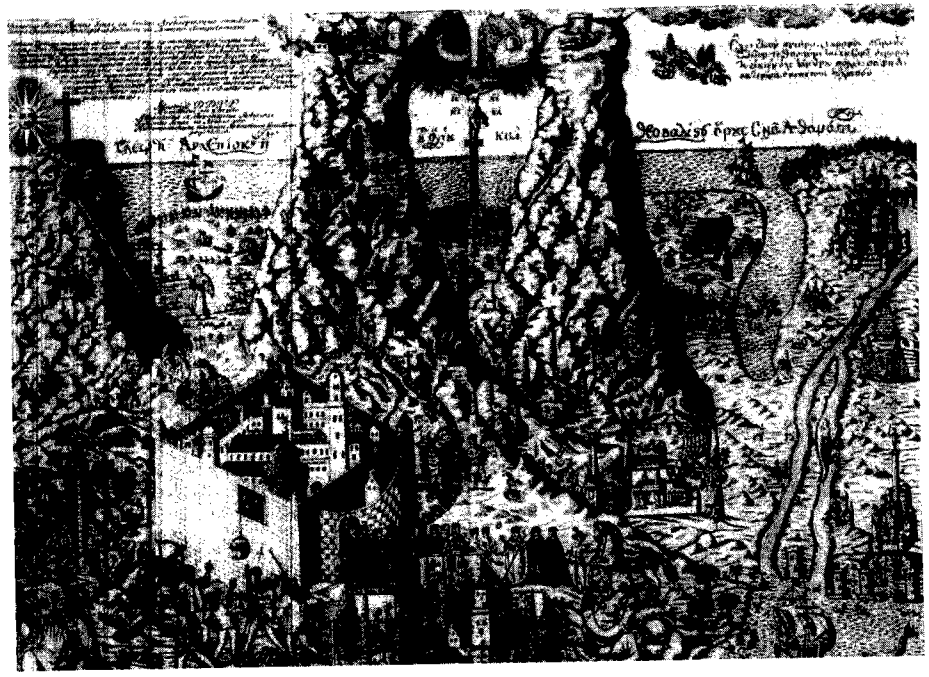


Fig. 26. *General View of Mount Sinai,* Venice, 1710. (National Gallery, Athens)

Byzantine renderings of the ladder, such as that painted in Venice in 1663 by the Cretan Emmanuel Tzanē-Bounialēs (fig. 27).[29]

In the lower level of the icon, the Leviathan awaits the souls of fallen ascetics. It is depicted in a shape similar to that of the monstrous creatures that infest the troubled Aegean waters in dalla Via's representation. For the Venetian engraver and the people of his time, these creatures were not just allegorical representations crowding the oceans of maps and globes; they had inhabited the abysses of the Aegean at least since the time of Xerxes. A symbol of evil in Judeo-Christian literature, whales had long been represented as sea monsters and personifications of chaos.[30]

On Tzanē-Bounialēs's icon of the *Ladder,* the scene is split in two. The right side of the icon is occupied by an earthly scene (Saint John composing the treatise in his cave), whereas the left side features a spiritual ascent. In dalla Via's engraving, these two dimensions are superimposed on one another. The geography of the Holy Mountain embodies the spiritual ascent. Komnēnós's

Fig. 27. Emmanuēl Tzanē-Bounialēs, *The Ladder of Saint John Climacus*, 1663. (Museum of the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, Venice)

unpretentious profiles are transformed into a theater for the struggle for human salvation. Cartographic stillness has turned into movement; spiritual quietness into drama. The turrets on the shore blast away at pirates. The sea, the torrent, the trees, the buildings, even the rocks cease to be static presences. They become dynamic actors in this universal drama. Deserted paths are suddenly populated with monks and pilgrims striving for salvation, like the ascetics climbing Saint John's Ladder. Dalla Via's representation not only describes, but "magnifies and glorifies" the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy. It reveals to the pilgrim a spiritual path by means of a set of physical features.[31]

The drama increases as one follows upward the crowded sequence of features. The climax is reached on the summit of the mountain, in the chapel of the Transfiguration. The sharp cypresses lined up on the ridge of the peninsula get thicker, leading to Athos's holy pinnacles. They surround it like the edges of an iron fence protecting an enchanted garden—the Garden of the Mother of God. Athos's two peaks stand out as a gate to eternity, as the *Ōraía Pylē*, or Royal Doors of the church's iconostasis. While late Byzantine Athos as a *locus amoenus* was attained through the rhetorical use of classical elements and iconographies, Athos as a "normalized" space for post-Byzantine pilgrimage now drew its iconic power from the spatiality of a classic of Byzantine iconography (St. John's Ladder), as well as from famous biblical mountains.[32]

Other mountain iconographies, besides that of Sinai, are superimposed on Athos. Three crosses top the eastern ridge of the peninsula, transforming the Aegean mountain-peninsula into a Golgothá. Athos's pinnacles are split in three, echoing representations of Mount Tabor on icons of the Transfiguration. The summit of Athos has indeed become a "geographical icon" of the Transfiguration of Christ, as the chapel "*tēs Metamorfōseōs*" confirms. But in dalla Via's geographical imagination, Athos remained first of all a gateway to the heavenly kingdom, the "narrow door" described in Matthew's Gospel and painted at the entrance of Docheiariou Monastery. On the bottom, a trilingual translation of the introductory poem in Komnēnos's *proskynētárion* frames the engraving. Like a map's legend, this poem provided the prospective pilgrim with a key—this time, the key to the "heavenly gate":

> O glory be unto our Lord Whom all of us adore,
> Pray He grant us right-thinking so we may tell our tale.
> Whoever harbours the desire should go on pilgrimage to see the Holy Mountain and to make the round of it.

For if your wish is to enjoy an earthly paradise,
Then to the Holy Mountain go and marvel at it all.
You learn the meaning of virtue and find contentment there in reading good
books and prayer, in chant and vigils kept.
There're relics there of sainted men and tomes supremely wise
And wonder-working icons too, and cells of hermit monks.
Abandon then the mundane world and all its tumults flee,
To Athos, Holy Mountain, go, live holily in God.
Thus win salvation of the soul that flows from God Himself;
So shall you with the blest possess the theocratic land.
It is inhabited throughout by many thousands monks,
Some of them in coenobia and some as anchorites.
And such of you as haven't gone to see what Athos holds,
Go all of you with willing grace and make due pilgrimage.
If you are pious and devout and wish your soul be saved,
Then venerate there and look round at other things besides:
The caves, the hermits and their cells and the dependent skētē,
The relic of Saint Anne preserved inside a reliquary.[33]

In front of this 29.3 × 42–inch engraving, the gazes of the prospective pilgrim and his non-pilgrim fellows would have lost themselves in a wealth of details. Their eyes would have crossed the rough sea and its threats, wandered through Athos's twisting paths, climbed up the torrent, paused on the Mother of God and Christ. At the same time, the compositional rhetoric of the engraving would have set the observer at the center of the scene, offering him an impossible totalizing view.

Post-Byzantine painting technique provided a Renaissance dream with consistency: it transformed a mountain-peninsula into an actual theater, as explicitly stated in *Théatron Sancti Montis Athōnos,* a later version of the same engraving printed by an anonymous Venetian typographer. The relationship between maps and theater scenery was familiar to Renaissance cosmographers. The titles of some of their most famous works are quite explicit: Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1570), John Speed's *Theater of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611), or Vincenzo Coronelli's *Teatro città* (1696–97). As with dalla Via's engravings and Komnēnós's *proskynētárion,* these projects responded to the Renaissance quest for moral spaces at a time of profound political distress.

The theater, metaphorical and actual, was a powerfully moralized space in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Any description of the world-theater—from the microscale and detail of Pieter Brueghel's high-oblique views of village scenes, to the global scale of Ortelius's world maps—had human salvation as its primary concern. Renaissance atlases also served as memory theaters: as educational devices that helped the reader retain historical (mainly biblical and classical) events in his memory through their spatial visualization. While enabling the viewer to gain familiarity with Athos's monasteries and its traditions, representations such as dalla Via's (who was personally acquainted with and worked for Coronelli) and *Théatron Sancti Montis Athōnos* were primarily set as stages for salvation. The true goal of these spiritual maps was to conduct the prospective pilgrim beyond the "heavenly gate"—beyond the two summits of Athos, to the realm of eternity. In between the two pinnacles of the *Théatron Sancti Montis Athōnos* engraving, the "Hymn Akáthistos" magnified the celestial Patroness of the Mountain who awaited the pilgrim beyond the gate.[34]

Athos as an Actual Door

Athos was not simply a metaphorical door to the heavenly kingdom. In 1702, just after the publication of Komnēnós's *proskynētárion,* the painter Constantinos turned the Holy Mountain into an actual door. Prince Brancovan commissioned the artist, who led a group of master painters from Hurez, for the decoration of the church of Polovraci Monastery, which was one of his own foundations in Wallachia. Instead of frescoing the church's *exonarthex* with the traditional representation of the Last Judgment, the artists framed its entrance with the two slopes of Athos (fig. 28) as they appeared on the engraving in Komnēnós's *proskynētárion* (fig. 23).[35]

Every day, before the sun rose on the verdant Wallachian countryside, the monks and nuns of Polovraci entered the "House of God," the heaven on earth which is the Orthodox Church, literally *passing through* Athos's pinnacles. And they passed through them again for vespers, before the sun completed its daily journey over the Balkans—today, they continue to do so. Athos, a geographical feature located in a different country and a place most of Polovraci's monastics probably never visited, thus became part of their daily liturgical life. It became a threshold between sacred and secular, heavenly and terrestrial, referent and

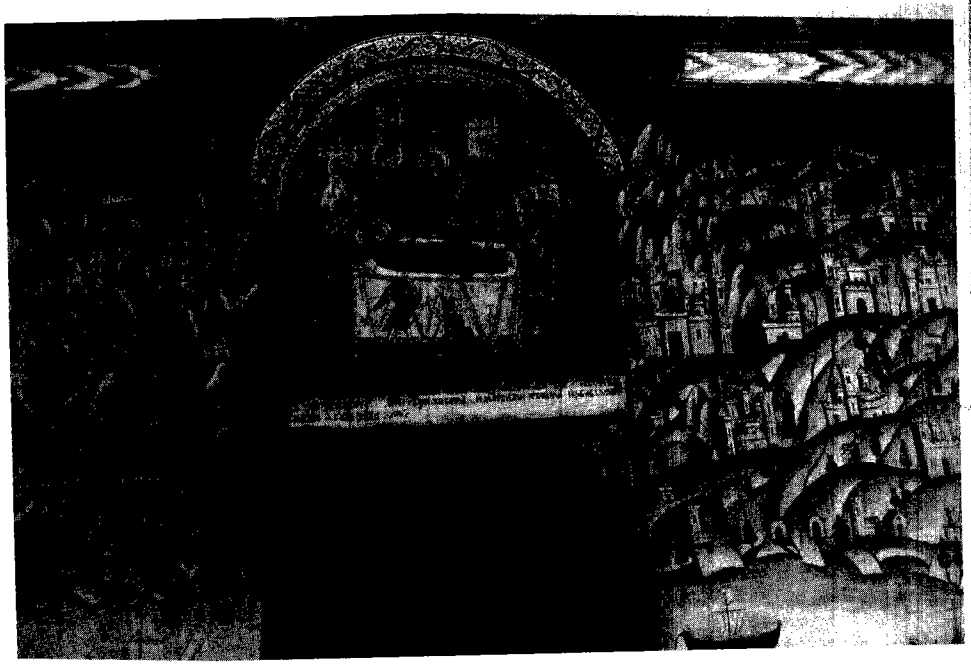


Fig. 28. The two slopes of Mount Athos frescoed in the *exonarthex* of Polovraci Monastery, Romania, 1702. (Photograph by Mariana Korpos)

symbol. Above all, it remained a doorstep to salvation, for, as Saint Augustine stated, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus,* "outside of the Church there is no Salvation." Between the two pinnacles of Athos, the Dormition of the Virgin (to which the church had been dedicated) features in a niche. The scene offered itself as a further aid for the pious clergy and visiting laymen: as the "heavenly Ladder whereby God came down," as the "bridge leading those of earth to Heaven" and the "Gate of Salvation" with which the Mother of God is identified in the "Hymn Akáthistos."[36]

Brancovan was a ruler who greatly contributed to artistic development in Romania. Marvelous mural paintings and expensive iconostases in his religious foundations still bear witness to his pious magnanimity. These works played a moralizing role and at the same time corroborated nationalistic sentiments, promoting the image and the work of the ruler. Beside traditional representations of saints and biblical episodes, the Siege of Constantinople of AD 626 accompanied by the "Hymn Akáthistos" became a recurrent theme in sixteenth-century Romanian painting. Frescoed on the walls of some of the

most popular religious foundations, the scene evoked the happy intervention of the Mother of God during the siege by the Persians. It thus came to signify an invocation for the victory over the Ottomans.[37]

The frescoes of Dobrovat Monastery (1529) were even more explicit. The votive paintings in the *naós* feature the prince founder of the church and his descendents as they offer the building to the enthroned Christ. In the *pronaós,* the geographical focus shifts from the homeland toward the three foci of Orthodoxy that survived the Fall of Constantinople: Sinai, Jerusalem, and Mount Athos. If princely bodies have been traditionally identified with their countries' "body politics" (see fig. 10), here the bodies of saints personify the Holy Places. The Ladder of Saint John of Sinai, the Miracle of Saint Savvas of Jerusalem, and the Miracle of Saint Athanasius of Mount Athos are for the first time brought together in a single representation. The three spiritual capitals of the Ottoman-dominated Eastern Christian world are grouped on the walls of Dobrovat as "a memento, a call to fight, for the defense of the ancestors' faith and of the country's freedom."[38]

The Athos wall painting at Polovraci can be located within the same tradition. By placing such a large composition on the walls of the *exonarthex,* at the very entrance of the church, Constantinos realized a sort of memento, "a call to a journey the ruling prince never began, given the difficult circumstances of his reign." But unlike the allegorical representations at Dobrovat, Mount Athos, a nonbiblical geographical feature, was represented here as such (and probably for the first time) on a church wall, infringing the canons of Orthodox painting. By the time of Brancovan's reign, Athos's role as the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy had become popular and uncontested. Athos had become an icon not only in the sense of a gateway to heaven, but also in that of a symbol—a symbol of Orthodoxy, and perhaps also a symbol of itself.[39]

Athos as a Symbol

The Romanians on Athos

Brancovan's tragic end in 1714 marked a new era in the history of the Danubian Principalities. In order to restrict the independence of the old local rulers, Istanbul turned to a new system in selecting its Romanian vassals. Greeks from Constantinople (the so-called Phanariotes) now replaced local princes, operating as rulers and mediators between the principalities and the Porte.

Consequently, Moldavia and Wallachia became Ottoman provinces to a larger extent than they had ever been before. Phanariot rule lasted until about 1830.[40]

In this period, the two provinces, geographically located on the route between Moscow and Constantinople, were a theater of repeated Russian occupation. The Treaty of Adrianople, which followed the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29, without overturning Ottoman suzerainty, placed Wallachia and Moldavia under Russian military rule and restored local governors to power. Meanwhile, on the wave of rising nationalistic movements in Europe, French-educated Romanians were advocating the unification of their lands in an independent state. In February 1848, the installation of a revolutionary government in Bucharest was unsuccessfully attempted, and the principalities remained a Russian protectorate.[41]

After the Crimean War (1853), the Russian protectorate was replaced by a tutelage shared by Ottomans and a Congress of Great Powers. In 1861, the powers accepted the unification of the provinces' administration. This led to the creation of a Romanian state, whose independence was officially recognized in 1878. The repercussions of these events soon reached the Holy Mountain. The foundations of Athos, like those of the Holy Lands and Sinai, had traditionally benefitted from the profits of the so-called "Dedicated Monasteries," or untaxed monastic estates owned by the Eastern Orthodox Church in Romania (which was in strict obedience to the Greek Orthodox Church at the time). In 1863, these estates, which occupied no less than one-fifth of the national territory, were confiscated by the state. The monasteries of Mount Athos thus lost a major source of income.[42]

Political changes impacted Athos also at other levels. In Romania, as in the rest of the Balkans, nationalisms were replacing the shared, cosmopolitan Orthodox Christian identity typical of post-Byzantine culture. Mount Athos was thus transformed from a sacred landmark of collective Orthodox geographical imagination into a symbolic place in which to plant "national flags." Appropriation was no longer attainable through patronage and financial support only, but rather through the physical installation of national foundations in the Athonite territory. Nineteenth-century visual representations of Athos reflected this shift from Holy Mountain of Salvation to a landmark to be "colonized."[43]

In 1855, the first Romanian *skētē* was officially established on the peninsula. *Skētes* are monastic communities that live separately from the twenty

ruling monasteries of the Holy Mountain, but are each in obedience to one of them. These monastic dependencies are made up of a number of cells arranged around a church and sometimes look much like a monastery. From an administrative point of view, skētes do not have right to vote in the council (being directly subordinated to the ruling monasteries). A charter issued in 1783 by Patriarch Gabriel IV limited the number of monasteries on the peninsula to twenty. This, however, did not prevent the construction of new *skētes* that resembled monasteries such as the Romanian.[44]

Of course, the presence of Romanians on Athos was not completely new—Wallachian monks are recorded to have been admitted to the Monastery of Koutloumousiou as early as the fourteenth century in exchange for the financial support of Voivode John Vladislav. What was new was the establishment of a significant and distinctively Romanian foundation.[45]

Around 1750, a few hermits under the guidance of Elder Macarie were said to live in seclusion near the chapel of Saint John the Baptist, in direct sight of the peak of Athos. By the end of the century, there were three Romanian hermits: confessor Iustin the Vlach and two apprentices, Patapie and Grigorie. In 1820, Patapie and Grigorie purchased from the Monastery of Megistē Lavra a cell formerly inhabited by a hermit from Chios and were issued a document which allowed its upgrading to skētē, and thus the possibility of its enlargement. But the two monks had to abandon their projects soon, with the outbreak of the Greek Revolution. From 1821 to 1829, the overwhelmingly Greek Athos community, which had supported the revolution, suffered greatly from Turkish depredations. Due to these difficult circumstances, Patapie and Grigorie left Athos for Moldavia, where they ended their days. The cell returned to its mother-monastery.[46]

In 1852, two other Moldavian fathers, Nifon and Nectarios, once again purchased the cell from Lavra (on which it nevertheless continued to depend from an administrative point of view). Some time later, the original 1820 document was retrieved in the Moldavian monastery where Patapie and Grigorie had concluded their lives. The document was shown to the then ruling prince Gregory Ghica, who issued another charter officially upgrading the cell to "Moldavian Skētē." As such, it was immediately registered in the codex of the Holy Community of Athos. In 1855, a chrysobull issued by the prince defined the skētē as "Romanian," and the following year the foundation received the seal from the ecumenical patriarch.[47]

In 1857, Nifon, the *díkaios* of the Athonite Skētē of Saint John the Forerunner,

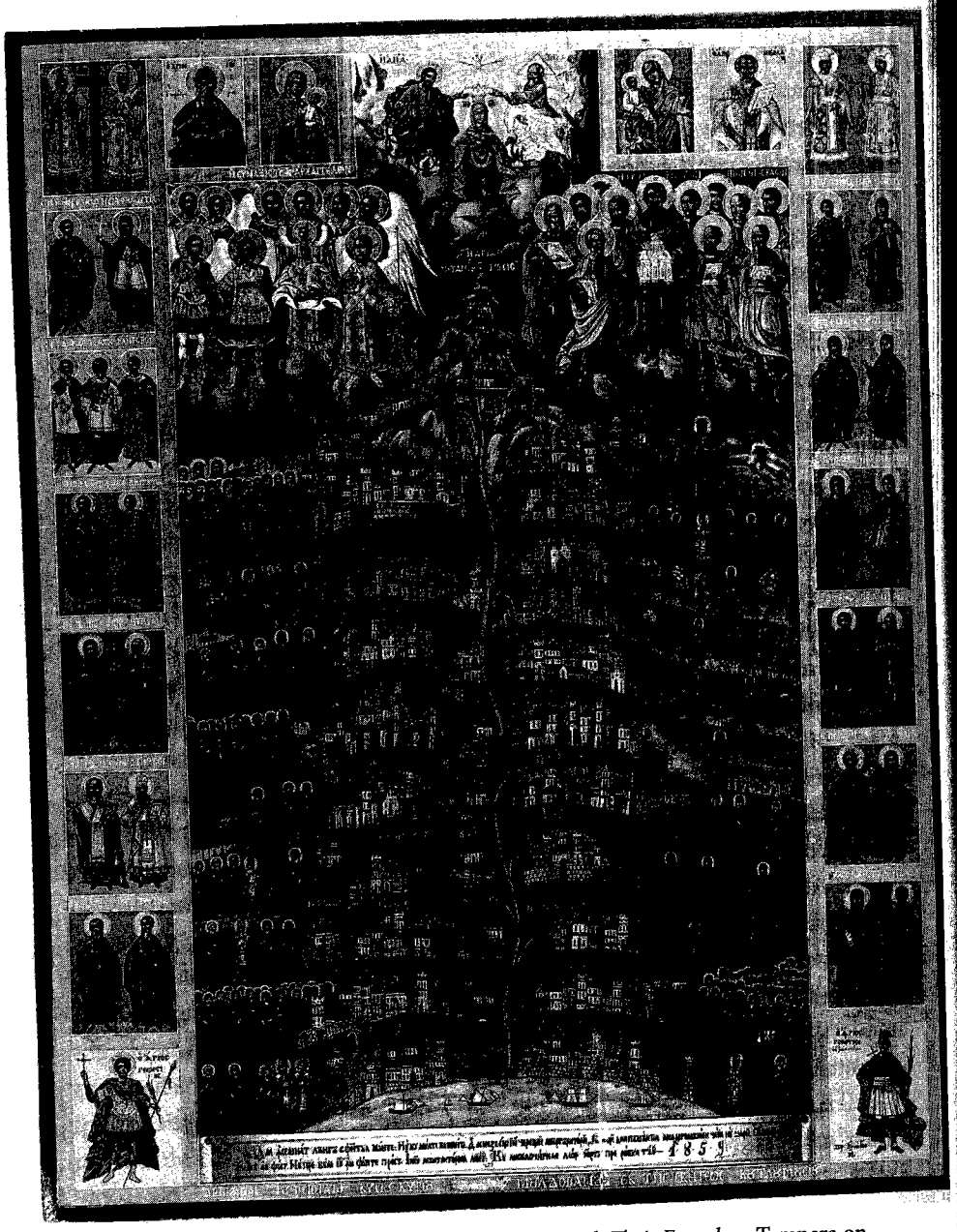


Fig. 29. Gennadios, *The Monasteries of Mount Athos with Their Founders.* Tempera on wood. Skētē of Saint John the Forerunner, 1859. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

placed the cornerstone of the *kyriakón.* He then sent two brethren to Romania to announce to the prince and the metropolitan of Wallachia "the beginnings of the Romanian skētē on the Holy Mountain," to which "all the people of Romania were invited." Two years thereafter, the Romanian painter Gennadios produced a portable, wooden, egg-based-tempera icon featuring the Holy Mountain with its founding fathers, framed by national saints (fig. 29).[48]

While other non-Greek monasteries (for example, the Serbian Hilandar, or the Bulgarian Zografou) are simply labeled by name, the Skētē of Saint John the Forerunner is proudly characterized as "Romanescou." In the inscription at the bottom of the icon, Gennadios declared: "I have painted beside Mount Athos, not with many words, divine pearls which blossomed from the land of little Moldoromania. These were human beings too, but not like my humble self. Jesus my Saviour, with the intercession of these saints, forgive your servant."[49]

As with the Venetian sacred engravings of the Athonite monasteries (for example, fig. 24), Gennadios's icon provided the Romanian skētē with a "visual pedigree." Unlike the Athonite monasteries, however, the newly established foundation did not boast ancient legends and miracles. It had not been founded by famous Byzantine emperors; nor had it been visited by the Archangels; nor did it ever host ranks of martyrs, like those of Vatopedi, Ivēron, or Zografou who had been burned alive, or drowned by the Latins during the reign of Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259–82). The Skētē of Saint John the Forerunner, however, could build its fame upon national saints and its unique geographical location, 820 feet above sea level and in direct sight of Athos's marble summit.[50]

The icon presented the viewer with an exquisitely Romanian genealogical tree of Mount Athos. The representation was also a "geographical" Tree of Jesse, whose trunk was to be found in the torrent, and whose branches in the monasteries with their respective founding fathers, saints, and martyrs. On post-Byzantine Athos, representations of Jesse's Tree were commonly included in the iconographic scheme of major monuments, as in the refectory of Lavra, or Docheiariou's *katholikón.* Superimposing this verdant sacred iconography on the Holy Mountain, Gennadios linked Athos's genealogy to the saints "*blossoming* from the *land* of little Moldo-Romania," as he stated in the inscription. The Romanian saints literally framed Athos in two vertical sections, like precious "pearls" embedded in a golden Gospel. They unambiguously referred the faithful to the Skētē "Romanescu," opening a dialogue between the frame

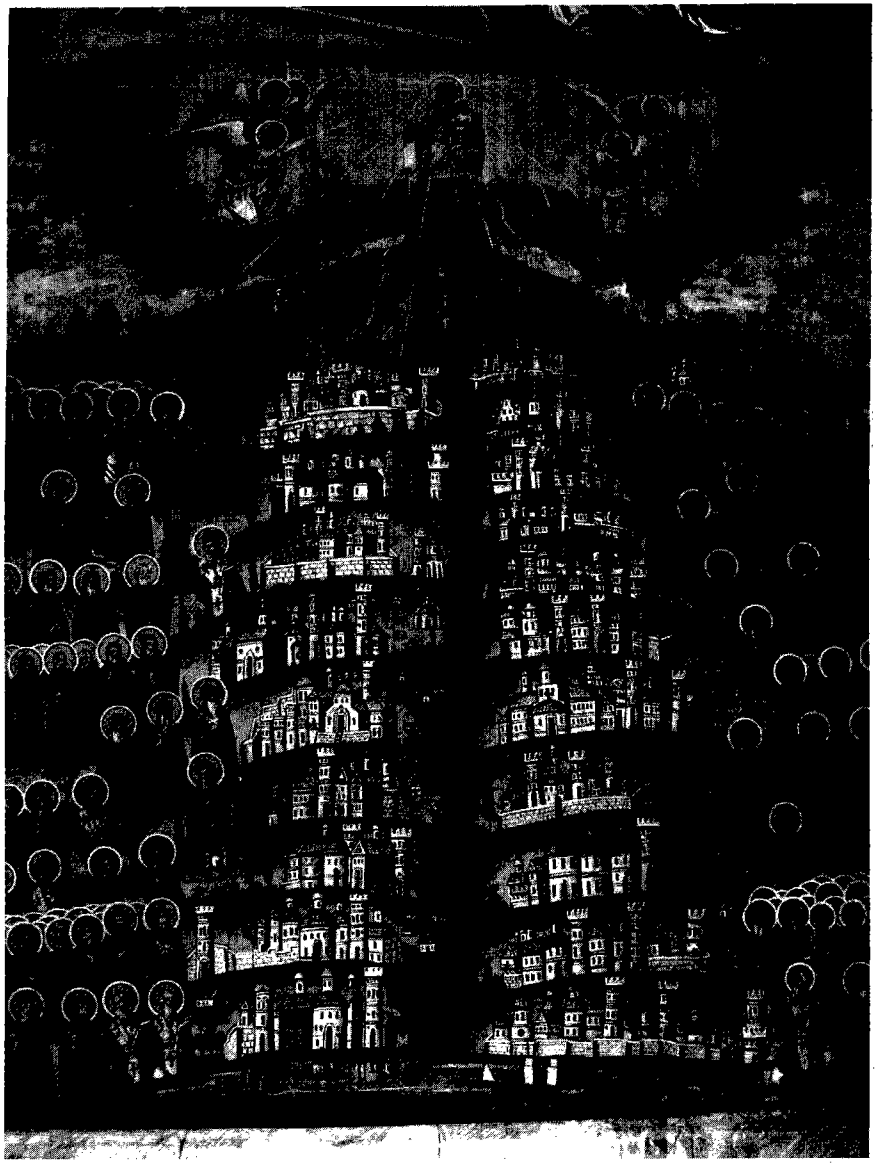


Fig. 30. The monasteries of Mount Athos and their founders frescoed in the *exonarthex* of the *kyriakón* of the Skēte of Saint John the Forerunner, 1866. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

of the icon and its subject, between Romania and Athos, between the spiritual heritage of Gennadios's compatriots and the founding fathers of the ancient Athonite monastic foundations.

As with the Venetian engravings, here the believer found himself once again within a theater. Standing in the middle of the stage (the sea), he was "wrapped" by the Mountain, framed by a golden curtain of holy icons. This arrangement evoked seventeenth-century cartographic representations, where the map proper was surrounded by vignettes and human figures in the margins, like "a theater curtain opening onto the spectacle of the world." While the Venetian *Théatron Sancti Montis Athōnos* and dalla Via's engraving invited the viewer to scrutinize the various scenes on the holy peninsula, and the gaze was distracted by detail and caught up by movement, here the Romanian painter obtained the opposite effect. In the middle of the stage, the curious observer became a contemplative "observed." His gaze was returned by those of the saints and the Mother of God. Athos was no longer a cartographic object; it was a mirror.[51]

Gennadios literally transformed a terrestrial journey into a spiritual ascent. He did so by reversing the official ranking of Athos's monasteries, which is based on their antiquity and importance, and establishing a new hierarchy based on their geographical distance from the tip of the peninsula (and hence from the summit of Athos). On the left side were the monasteries located on the western slope; on the right hand were those on the eastern. A pilgrim sailing from the neck of the peninsula to its point passed by the monasteries in the exact bottom-up order in which Gennadios represented them. The privileged position of the Romanian skētē was immediately visible, as the horizontal spatial axis of terrestrial life turned into a vertical axis pointing at heaven. Thanks to its geographical proximity to the summit, in Gennadios's icon the skētē could be easily elevated from the bottom of Athos's institutional ranking to the top. Altitude equaled beatitude.[52]

Today this unusual icon is preserved in a chapel, but we can easily imagine it hanging on the walls of some hall in the skētē as pilgrims and visitors from Romania admired it and felt proud that their homeland too was now physically represented in the sanctuary of Orthodoxy.

In 1866, thanks to a generous donation by Prince Alexander Demetrios Ghica, the *kyriakón* was completed. Metropolitan Isaiah of Diocletia was sent to its inauguration on behalf of the Romanian government and the metropolitan of Bucharest. Together with more than two hundred Romanian pilgrims,

he could admire an enlarged reproduction of Gennadios's icon on the *exonarthex* of the *kyriakón* (fig. 30).[53]

Here the presence of the skētē became even more prominent. In proximity to the top of the western slope, the new tiny Romanian Skētē assumed the same proportions as the Great Lavra. While the other monasteries were represented as mere cartographic symbols which bore scarce resemblance to their actual architectural form and colors, the Romanian Skētē was faithfully reproduced from a bird's-eye perspective, with its characteristic Moldo-Wallachian entrance. Greek viewers considered the wall painting *a-téchnē,* or scarcely artistic. To Romanians, however, the fresco made a powerful statement in 1866: a tiny piece of their country had been *truly* transported to the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy. It lay close to its top and was directly illuminated by the Mother of God. However, the true "colonizers" of the peninsula had just started to arrive.[54]

Russian "Visions of Desire"

As the cornerstone of the Romanian *kyriakón* was being placed, Athos had just started to be "invaded" by increasing numbers of Russians. Unlike the Romanians, the Russians claimed a more than eight-century-long legacy with the Holy Mountain. The first Russian monks settled on Athos as early as the eleventh century. Their first monastery was founded in 1030 and was located on the site of the present Skētē of Bogoroditsa. About a century later, the Russians were allowed to occupy the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon, which was then situated at a considerable distance inland from its present site. Before the nineteenth century, Russian monks never exceeded a few hundred. Apart from a period of revival between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, their history is one of poverty and decline. An entirely Greek monastery for more than one hundred years, in 1835 Saint Panteleimon went bankrupt and was risking closure. "The Greek monks, under their abbot Gerasimos, decided that the only course of action open to them was to invite the Russians, described by the itinerant monk Parfeny Aggev as 'the ancient inhabitants of this house,' to return."[55]

In 1839, the Russians were reinstated at Saint Panteleimon and their wealth rescued the monastery from debt and decay (fig. 31). Over the following seventy years, the Russian population of Athos witnessed a dramatic increase. By the 1870s, besides Saint Panteleimon, the Russians possessed two other substantial

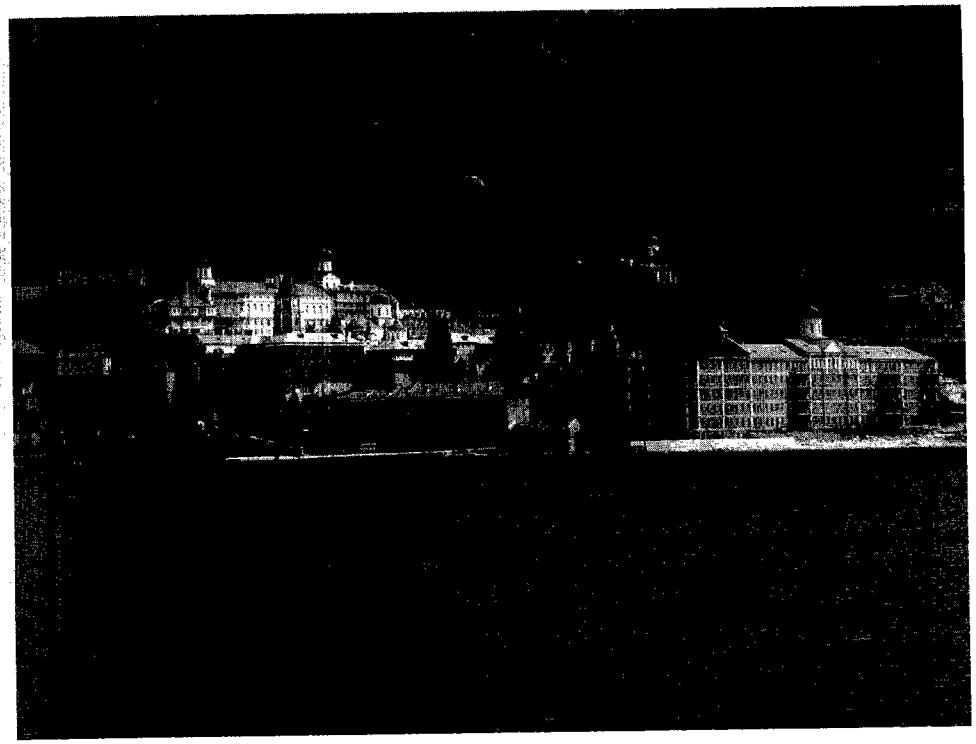


Fig. 31. The Russian Monastery of Saint Panteleimon. (Photograph by the author)

houses—the flourishing Skētes of Prophet Elijah and Saint Andrew, the latter known on the peninsula as "the Serraï," or the Seraglio, after the magnificence of its lavish buildings. Strategically located just outside of Karyés and hosting the second-biggest church in the Balkans, Saint Andrew was an eloquent, almost outrageous reminder of Russian wealth to the impoverished Greek Athonite population. By 1902, 48 percent of the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain were Russians (3,500 in number), whereas only 42 percent were Greek. By World War I, about ninety cells and smaller dwellings (out of a total of some two hundred) were Russian.[56]

In the nineteenth century, Mount Athos occupied a unique place in the Russian geographical imagination. As with the Moldo-Wallachian rulers, the Russian tsars envisaged themselves as the new inheritors and patrons of Orthodox Christianity. Over the previous century, Russia's prestige had escalated in the Balkans. After defeating Turkey (though not decisively) in 1774, Russia was granted the right to build an Orthodox church in Constantinople, and

Catherine the Great was dreaming of her grandson Constantine's rule over Constantinople as its first Christian Orthodox "governor" since the Fall of the Byzantine Empire. Nothing came of Catherine's dream, but her successors kept up the struggle against the Turks and campaigned for holy places as effective strategies to gain popularity.[57]

This renewed interest in the Holy Mountain was the result of various circumstances. For the Russians and all the Orthodox people, Jerusalem, Sinai, and Athos represented, as we have seen, the three great iconic foci of Christianity, and therefore main destinations for pilgrimage. While the Latins had been favored by the Ottomans in the Holy Land as a result of the 1740 Capitulation signed with the French, by the 1830s, most of the pilgrims to the Holy Land were Orthodox. But in vain did Tsar Nicholas I and the Archimandrite Porfiry attempt to establish a strong Russian ecclesiastical presence in Jerusalem and contest Latin influence. In 1851, Napoleon III had his ambassador to the Porte force the Ottomans to recognize France as the "sovereign authority" in the Holy Land. This change in authority opened a dispute between the Russians and the French which was eventually won by the latter, putting an end to the Russian challenge in the Holy Land and setting the ground for the Crimean War (1853–56).

As noted by Nicholas Fennell, Greek historians have traditionally considered the Russian disappointment in the Holy Land as the beginning of a progressive attempt to "colonize" Athos and thus to establish a new highly symbolic sphere of influence in the Levant. Although, unlike the case of the Holy Land, a clear-cut Russian policy toward Athos in reality never existed, nor, until the twentieth century, was the government ever directly involved in the affairs regarding the Holy Mountain, Athos did become increasingly popular in Russia during those years.[58]

Regardless of the tsars' intentions and policies, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the two-way traffic between Athos and Russia ended up intensifying to a dramatic extent. The Athonite fathers, especially from Slav monasteries such as Saint Panteleimon or Zografou, undertook long alms-gathering missions to Russia, where increasing numbers of pious women, who could not of course visit the Holy Mountain, and other categories of non-pilgrims were sending private donations to the peninsula, or making deposits in Athonite bank accounts. At the same time, unprecedented masses of Russian pilgrims traveled annually to the Holy Mountain. These pilgrims were mainly

merchants, retired army officers, civil servants, as well as soldiers and peasants who embarked primarily from Odessa.[59]

Their long and arduous journey to the Holy Mountain was organized (and made possible) through a vast network of contacts and dependencies. Saint Panteleimon and the two Russian skētes owned enormous hostels in their *metochia* (monastic dependencies) in Odessa and Constantinople, which were able to shelter up to several hundred pilgrims. During the stay at these dependencies, the monks would take charge of the pilgrim's paperwork, so that by the departure of the next ship to Athos, he would have all the necessary documents. The Russian network was entirely self-supporting; it was so efficient and well-organized that no official aid was ever needed. Although Odessa was the main point of embarkation, some Athonite institutions also owned dependencies in other parts of the Black Sea, from where pilgrims could board. The Russian Skētē of Prophet Elijah, for example, owned one in Taganrog, on the northeastern extremity of the Azov Sea. Since the mid-1870s, every year a *goletta,* named after the Skētē of Prophet Elijah, left its port in late August and arrived at Athos after approximately two months of navigation.[60]

Iconic Athos played a crucial role in the Russian popular geographical imagination. In a way, its peculiar geography seemed created for the specific purpose of stirring imagination and arousing spiritual desire. We can easily imagine how a Russian pilgrim, after several weeks of navigation, was likely to have felt at the sight of the Holy Mountain from the sea. We can imagine his emotion while discovering the mysterious contour of the mountain-peninsula looming on the horizon. As has been noted, "the image of the cloud-covered mountain, glimpsed on the desert horizon, half-hidden from human view, is an intriguing one in the history of religion. . . . The seductive, ambivalent landscape of the half-seen mountain . . . is a metaphor to speak to God."[61]

The common image of Mount Athos, as observed on a flat sea surface from a certain distance, and generally topped by a tiny cloud, evocatively embodied the iconography of a threefold pattern described by Saint Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses.* The saint mapped the three great stages of spiritual life on a physical landscape. *Kátharsis,* or the purification of the soul from egoistical passions, *phōtisis,* the enlightenment of the soul by the Holy Spirit, and *théosis,* or union with God, were compared with the entry into a moonlit desert night, followed by a movement to a fog-covered mountain, and finally, into the impenetrable darkness of a thick cloud.

The mountain, the desert, and the sea, Tuan argues, constitute all "permanent fixtures in man's world." This quality makes them "archetypal forms" and allows their transformation into effective metaphors, into evocative landscapes of the soul. Surrounded by an aura of holiness and myth, the dark silhouette of Mount Athos was for the Russian pilgrim a metaphor as well as an object of spiritual longing. His pilgrimage to Athos blurred the boundaries between the physical and the metaphorical. It was no mere *"proskynēsis."* It implied a strenuous journey across the Black Sea and the Aegean, as well as an equally challenging inner journey across the desert of purification.[62]

The mountain looming on the horizon marked the awareness of a following phase: spiritual ascent. Before entering this phase, however, the mountain remained the destination, the object of desire. It was on the awesome cone of Athos that the pilgrim projected the lives, the teachings, and the miracles of the Athonite saints and ascetics about whom he had read or heard in his home country. In the same way that Saint Gregory's ascetic envisaged the mountain as a ladder to salvation, so did the pilgrim, from his ship, contemplate the dark profile of the peninsula, hoping for a blessing, a word of divine wisdom, a glimpse of paradise. Like Moses, he, too, longed to speak to God and to hear from Him.

It was not uncommon that a Russian pilgrim eventually decided to be tonsured and spend the rest of his life on Athos. After all, as Fennell noted, "the Russians who came to live on Athos were all pilgrims." The Russian outnumbering of Athos's Greek population occurred within a rather limited temporal span. Life on Athos was hardly easy for the Russians, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the demographic pressure within the contained space of the Holy Mountain and the economic gap between the Greek and the Russian populations were often grounds for internal quarrels and disputes. Even though financially privileged, Russian monks on Athos found themselves in a foreign land, far from home, and surrounded by a different culture and tradition, which they generally appeared to dislike. Linguistic and logistic problems often complicated things even further.[63]

One may then ask, what, in spite of all these difficulties, pushed an ever-increasing number of Russian settlers to Athos? According to Fennell, climate, the absence of women, and, above all, ascetic zeal all contributed to the late-nineteenth-century Russian boom. The presence of influential saints and "enlightened" elders was also a crucial factor. *Xeniteía,* or voluntary exile, was an ascetic path followed by many early saints in the Orthodox tradition. It

represented an escape from any material attachment or sentimental tie with this world, in pursuit of the death of passions and thus the achievement of spiritual quietness. Monks defined their life and the space of the monastery as *"ektós tou kósmou,"* not of this world. By extension, the whole Athonite peninsula, legally considered as one huge single monastery, was also regarded as "outside of the world." Many of the future Russian monks probably saw their settlement on Athos as the most appropriate ascetic path to salvation. They conceived their voluntary exile in direct imitation of the great ascetics of the past and of the contemporary holy men who dwelled on the peninsula.[64]

Political and cultural circumstances also favored such unprecedented zeal. In Russia, as elsewhere, the nineteenth century was a period of exploration and conquest. The increase of the Russian population on Athos was paralleled by a dramatic territorial expansion of the Russian imperial domains: "in the Far East, the vast Amur and Ussuri river valleys were annexed from a beleaguered and tottering Chinese Empire in 1860, and by . . . 1871 Samarkand and Tashkent had already been occupied by Russian forces and the invasion of Turkestan was well under way." As a result, by the end of the tsarist era in 1917, the Russian Empire was exceeded in size only by that of the British.[65]

By the 1850s, Greece and the Near East had become objects of interest not only for pilgrims, but also for Russian navy officers and diplomats. The region was attractive for its Christian shrines, as well as for the unfamiliar "picturesque" Ottoman environment. Even though, as I said, a Russian official policy for Athos, or an imperialistic plan for its "colonization" never existed in the nineteenth century, it was not without a certain patriotism that the Russians settled on the Holy Mountain. A mix of religious zeal and patriotic fervor was inspired by the then popular ideal of Christian heroism. As Fennell comments, "just as the explorers and conquerors of the Caucasus and Siberia were admired, so the Russian Athonites fired the public imagination." At a time of intense spiritual revival in Russia, these monks were regarded as saintly models and heroes in the public imagination.[66]

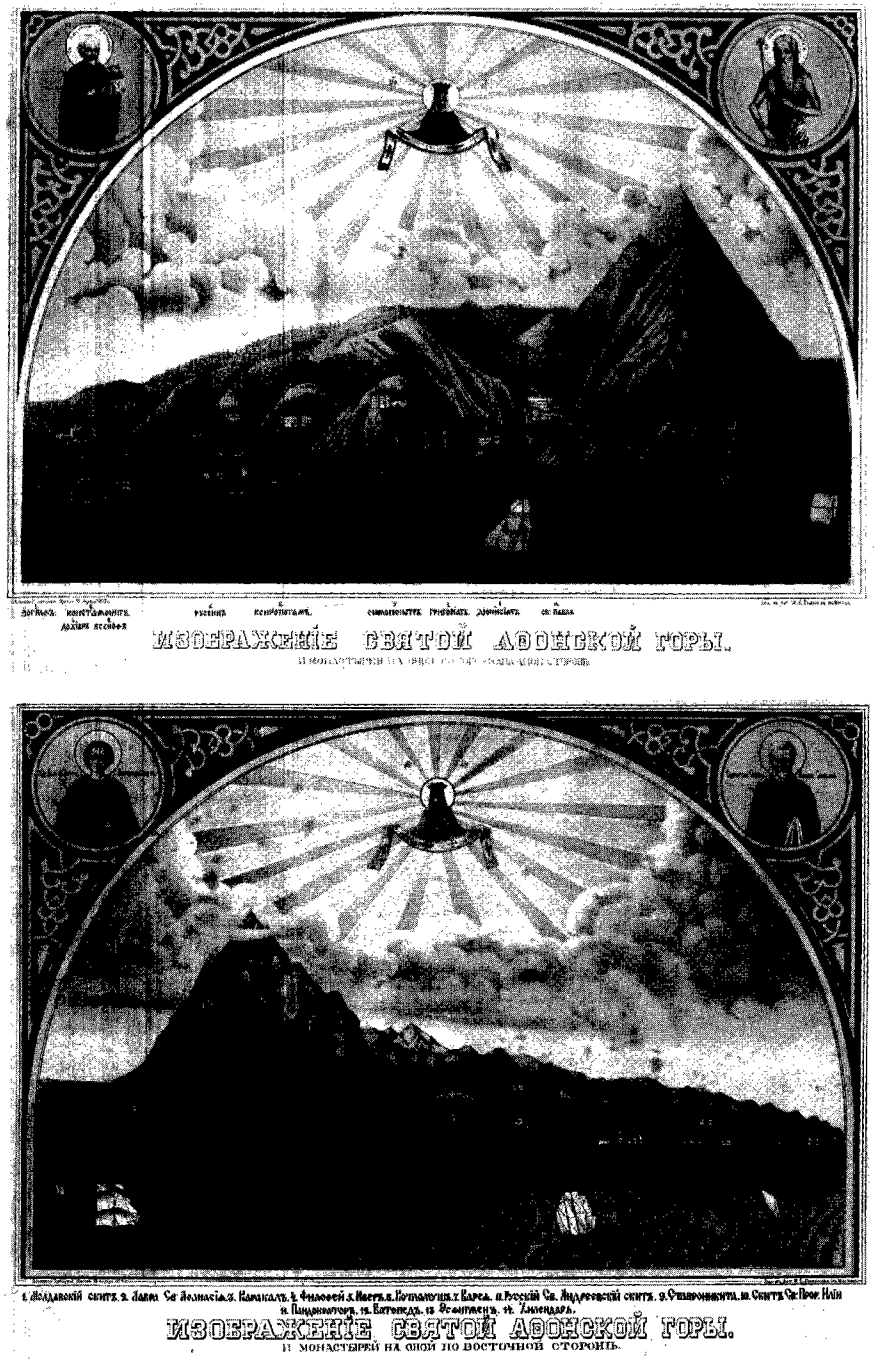
Russian visual representations of Athos effectively reproduced the interplay between the physical and the metaphorical Holy Mountain. But this time, verisimilitude was the inspiring principle. Unlike Venetian post-Byzantine engravings or Romanian icons and wall paintings, Russian coastal profiles of Athos no longer needed to be manifestly allegorical. They no longer needed to be crowded with sea monsters or saints, or to reshape Athos's physical geography on the models of Sinai, Tabor, Eden, or as a door to Paradise. Russian profiles

of Athos no longer served as sacred icons in the Orthodox sense of being windows on heaven; the real Athos they portrayed was itself an icon (in the sense of symbol), and a powerful one.

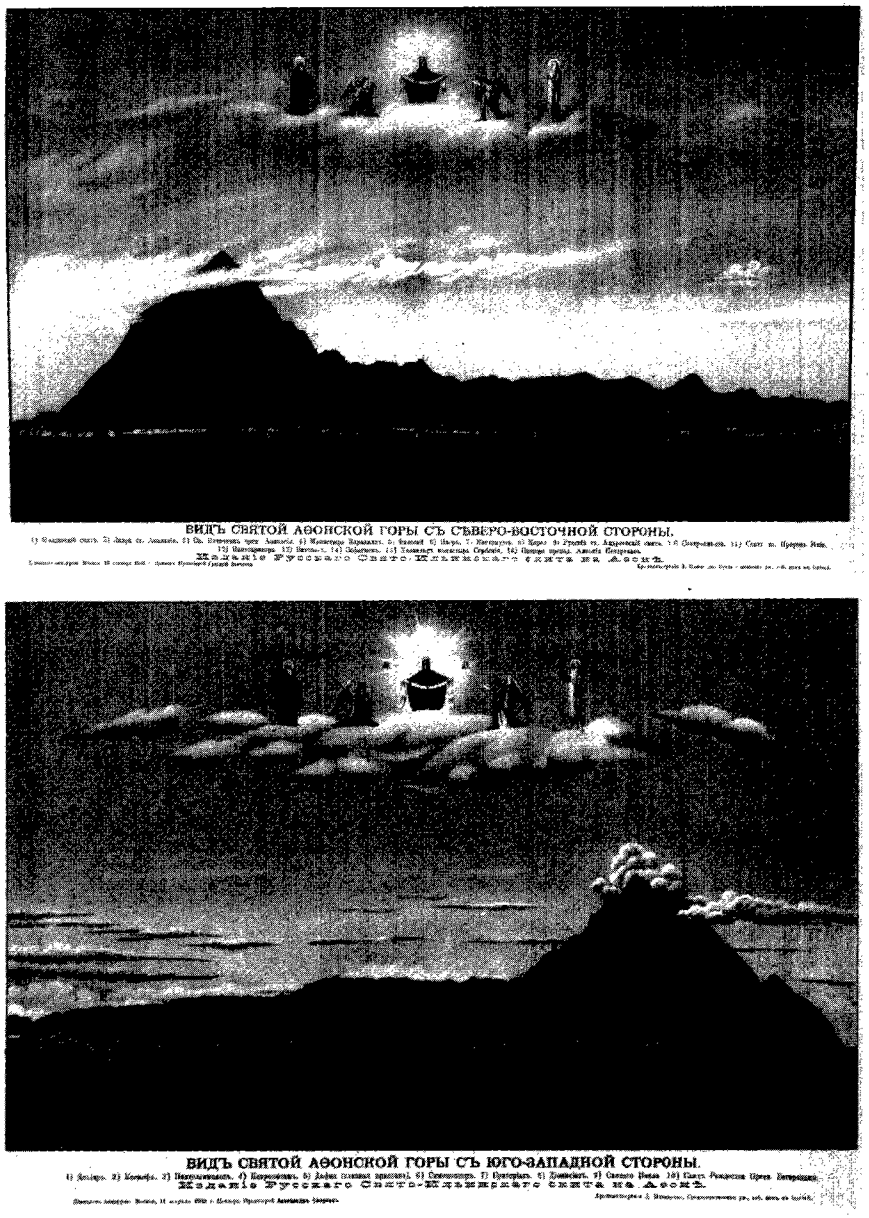
On two 1873 sacred postcards representing respectively the western and the eastern Athonite slopes, the peninsula is emptied of its inhabitants (figs. 32 and 33). Its detailed geomorphic forms tower over the sea. The founding fathers Athanasius and Peter, the protector of the Russian monastery (Saint Panteleimon), and Saint Savvas, archbishop of Serbia and founder of the Monastery of Hilandar, are relegated to the upper corners, outside of the scene. The peninsula is topped and enlightened by its Most Holy Protectress and Queen, the life-radiating Mother of God holding her girdle, which could be venerated by the pilgrim in the Monastery of Vatopedi. The various monasteries and skētes are accurately numbered and mapped, as with physical features in contemporary school atlases' georamas. Unlike post-Byzantine engravings, the "labels" do not feature on the mountain, but run below the image. They guided and helped the prospective pilgrim to orient himself on the Holy Mountain, and possibly to plan the itinerary of his visit.[67]

These cards were printed in Odessa in 1873, four years before the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, when anti-Ottoman feelings were strong, and the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon had started to become an increasingly important center of spiritual revival in Russia. As blessings from the Holy Mountain, the cards represented an anticipation for the pilgrims embarking for Athos. The direct encounter between a detailed physical landscape and the sacred image of the Mother of God produced a dreamlike effect. This was magnified by the light of sunset and sunrise, which also defined the orientation of the slope.[68]

Russian artists were well aware of the moral power of Athos's physical geography. A similar representation issued by the Russian Skētē of Prophet Elijah in 1901 was even more realistic (figs. 34 and 35). Saint Athanasius and Saint Peter, accompanied by two angels, stood on a cloud beside the Mother of God. The profile of the holy peninsula was portrayed from sea level, as the pilgrim actually saw it approaching in his boat in the quietness of a late summer evening (or early morning). The monasteries almost disappeared from sight, as they really would at such a distance from the coast. They became tiny spots, nevertheless still referenced on the bottom of the representation. The dark silhouette of Athos, the archetypal form of the holy mountain-peninsula, loomed on the horizon, silently suspended between the sea and the sky, between earth and heaven.



Figs. 32 and 33. Russian cards representing the western slope (*top*) and the eastern slope (*bottom*)of Mount Athos with its monasteries, 1873. (Mount Athos Map Library, Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras)



Figs. 34 and 35. Eastern slope (*top*) and western slope (*bottom*) of Mount Athos with its monasteries, 1902. (Mount Athos Map Library, Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras)

Athos's dreamscape displaced, but at the same time allured and enchanted. It quieted the soul. It whispered to the pilgrim that the Mother of God, the saints, and the archangels were *really* watching upon the mountain. This representation of Athos quietly reassured and comforted the pilgrim: he was bound to a most blessed destination, and therefore the Mother of God would protect him during his difficult journey. Like Gregory's ascetics traversing the desert of passions, the pilgrim who had endured sea storms, strong winds, and high waves was eventually to reach the tranquil harbor of Athos. And so was his soul.[69]

At the end of his journey, the pilgrim was to bring these sacred cards home as blessings. He could use them to share his experience with his wife and daughters, who would never visit the Holy Mountain. He could bring them to his local parish and pass them around. Some of the parishioners might have been tempted to follow his example and undertake the long pilgrimage, too. For many others, this remained impracticable. For them, Athos was to remain a sacred "landscape of desire" beyond physical reach. Easy to circulate, cards constituted effective vehicles to convey Athos as such in the Russian geographical imagination.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Russian profiles of the Holy Mountain enjoyed great success. They became part of the official identity of the monastic republic. Appropriated by Greek Athonites and reproduced on postcards and local souvenirs, stamps, and even on the front cover of Athos's 1931 Constitution booklet, Athos's sacred profiles played a role similar to that of maps in the construction of national identities. These representations played a pivotal role in turning Athos into an icon and in spreading this icon throughout the Orthodox imagination. They did so thanks to their ability to be reproduced and circulated across time and space. Given away as blessings, sacred landscape representations were first of all material objects that conveyed something of Athos's sacredness outside of the peninsula, and thus created a special bond between the faithful and the Holy Mountain. Richard Dawkins gives the following description of a wood-carved profile of Athos he purchased in 1936 (fig. 36):

> The wood-carving . . . is a view of Athos such as visitors and orthodox pilgrims may buy as a souvenir of their visit: I bought it myself in Kapsokalyvia. The design is quite formal and summary, and not much like the actual peninsula of Athos. It does indeed show a long ridge rising at the end to a

sharp peak, and among the woods the famous monasteries. Drawn from a non-existent point of view—unless indeed by a man in an airplane—topographical accuracy was hardly possible. But for its purposes the picture has no deficiencies at all. . . . It shows us Athos precisely how it is to the simple orthodox pilgrims who came there in such thousands before the war, and are still coming, though the defection of Russia has very greatly reduced their numbers. To these people geographical details are less than nothing. Their Athos is a great long mountain with a chapel of the Transfiguration perched on the peak, and on its sides the twenty great monasteries, the lesser *skētes,* hermitages and cottages in abundance, and high above all in the sky the figure of the Virgin, the Mother of God, the celestial patron and protector, stretching out over the slopes of the Mountain her holy Girdle, which is now stored away in a golden box in the monastery of Vatopedi.[70]

Material Possession and the "Rhetoric of Truth"

In the nineteenth century, Mount Athos did not only become an "object of spiritual desire" for an unprecedented mass of Russian pilgrims and new settlers. It also turned into an equally desirable destination for their compatriot scholars and collectors.

Self-proclaimed inheritor of the Byzantine Empire and "chosen bearer of true Christianity," nineteenth-century Russia saw a genuine rediscovery of Orthodoxy and its origins associated with an upsurge of mystical as well as "scientific" scholarly writing.[71] In the 1850s, Nicholas I, whose son personally visited the Holy Mountain, undertook, in cooperation with the Holy Synod, "the preservation of Russian ecclesiastical treasures (and Byzantine objects), their scientific description," and their representation in drawings. The Synod also proceeded to the founding of a museum of Christian iconography, to be equipped via an artistic-archaeological expedition to Athos.[72]

In the Ottoman-dominated Balkans, the Holy Mountain represented a unique oasis, where precious relics, icons, and manuscripts had been zealously treasured for centuries, escaping the sad fate of many other sacred objects in churches and monasteries located outside of its boundaries. A living repository of Byzantine tradition and artistic treasures, Athos (like Sinai) was an obvious destination for archaeologists sponsored by the Russian government to unearth the glorious origins of Orthodoxy (and hence Russia). It was also an obvious destination for private collectors seeking to enrich their own cabinets.

Fig. 36. Wood carving from Mount Athos, in R. M. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1936, facing p. 24).

Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastianov (1811–1867) was one of these private collectors. Born of a wealthy merchant family and educated as a lawyer, Sevastianov soon rose to the rank of state councilor. His status enabled him to travel extensively in Russia, mostly in the South. During his journeys, he cultivated the hobby of collecting, especially objects of Christian archaeology. After his retirement in 1851, however, his passion for collecting became much more than a simple pastime. His fame as a traveler and collector became so widespread within Russian high circles that in 1859 he was appointed and sponsored by the Synod and the Academy of Arts to undertake a scientific expedition to Athos in order to purchase books, icons, and copies of Byzantine painting. These would have served to equip the Museum of Christian Iconography and a class of Orthodox icon-painting at the Academy of Arts organized by Prince Gagarin in person.[73]

Before his activity became official, Sevastianov had already visited the Holy Mountain four times, and had exhibited his collection from Mount Athos in Paris, producing a great impression. In 1859, the Russian collector was thus well prepared for his official mission. The expedition had an international character and included copyists, topographers, and photographers. Based in

the Russian Skētē of Saint Andrew, it lasted fourteen months, during which detailed maps of the peninsula and its monasteries were drawn, antiquities and original manuscripts were purchased from the monks, and the earliest monuments of Athos catalogued and reproduced "as models of church art" through plans, sketches, but especially through several thousand photographs.[74]

Sevastianov operated at a time in which the modern scientific practice inherited from the Enlightenment had reached its apogee—in Europe, as well as among the Russian intelligentsia. It was also the period of European colonial expansion. The world was not only being systematically mapped, but also carefully classified and displayed in world exhibitions, museums, and botanical gardens. It was a time in which geography was starting to impose itself as an institutionalized discipline as well as "a rational form of knowledge," and production of knowledge itself was constructed on scientific measurement and Linnaean classification—in other words, on mapping.[75]

The Enlightenment has been traditionally described as a movement aimed at liberating men from fear through reason. A secular phenomenon, Enlightenment rationalism was therefore inevitably understood and lived in opposition to the "irrational" Church, from which it sought emancipation. In tsarist Russia, however, this opposition was never as sharp. Under Peter the Great, the country was reorganized along European patterns, whereas philosophical as well as artistic elements from the Western (especially French) Enlightenment constituted a strong presence in the courts of Catherine and her successors. Until the mid-nineteenth century, French was the official courtly and academic language.[76]

The nineteenth-century tsars, however, affirmed that "there was something uniquely and definitely not Western or European about Russia's national ethos." Orthodox Christianity constituted a fundamental element within such a narrative, and the doctrine of "Moscow as the Third Rome" gave the tsars (to whom the Holy Synod was subordinate) great political and spiritual power. By the nineteenth century, the influence of the French Enlightenment was a pervasive force, although confined to the very restricted circles of Russian intelligentsia and carefully filtered. Elements of Western art and modern scientific practice were soon absorbed within a context (that is, the Orthodox Church) utterly antithetical to the secular emancipation and scientific rationalism promoted by the Western Enlightenment.[77]

The Sevastianov expedition is emblematic of this unique encounter. Not only was it aimed at rediscovering the origins of Orthodoxy (thus corroborating

Moscow's self-proclamation as "the Third Rome"), but it was supposed to do so scientifically and with the support of modern technology. Already an iconic landscape of spiritual desire, Athos turned into a material place-object to be appropriated through systematic study and the physical possession of material artifacts. Like Napoleon's scholars landing in Egypt a half century earlier, Sevastianov's team surveyed, measured, photographed, recorded, collected, classified, catalogued, and eventually displayed Athos. But as we shall see in the next chapter, the Russians were not the only ones to do so.

4

ERUDITE ATHOS

In the late nineteenth century, Mount Athos was not only a destination for pious pilgrims and Russian scholars seeking the origins of Orthodox Christianity. For over the past hundred years, increasing numbers of non-Orthodox erudite travelers from Western Europe had also been venturing to the peninsula. Some of them reached it on horseback, accompanied by their retinue of servants, dragomans, and local guides. Others preferred challenging the tempestuous waters that had swallowed Mardonius's fleet, rather than the dangerous roads of Ottoman Greece, infested by brigands and malaria. Despite its centrality in classical studies, the eastern section of the Mediterranean map had for centuries remained largely unexplored by western Europeans. As late as the 1750s, Greece itself was still a sort of terra incognita in the Western geographical imagination, the destination for some rare lunatics and a "few desperate scholars."[1]

In the eighteenth century, most Grand Tourists went no farther south than Naples to complete their education. If the Mediterranean had been turned into a "cultural Eden" since the Renaissance, it was to Rome (and not to Greece) that most students, antiquarians, and classical scholars were directed. Until the early nineteenth century, classical knowledge was indeed a knowledge mediated through Imperial Rome. Eminent scholars like Winkelmann, surrounded, "indeed overwhelmed by 'Classical art' [were] not able to distinguish a pure Greek style through the plethora of Roman copies." Ottoman Greece remained too far away—geographically, logistically, and culturally.[2]

At the beginning of the century, however, the Napoleonic Wars (1802–15) forced English Grand Tourists either to stay at home or to risk travel beyond the well-trodden routes through France and Italy. At the same time, philhellenism, "the romantic idealization of the ancient Greeks [linked to] an enthusiasm for freeing modern Greeks from the Turk[ish] yoke," inflamed the imagination of European scholars with a novel force.[3]

If for centuries these had been content to visit Greece only via classical texts or, at most, to timidly contemplate the country from Italy, by the turn of the eighteenth century the materiality of place started to exercise its spell. In order to be experienced and narrated—to become "real"—the classics had to be backed by a solid ontological basis: by territory. Increasing numbers of travelers started to invade the land of Homer and Pericles, searching for the physical remains of an ideal. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the ruins and rugged sceneries of Greece had turned into a true Romantic obsession.[4]

One of the mythical mountains of the ancient Aegean, and an exotic corner of the Levant dotted with "picturesque" Byzantine monasteries, Mount Athos became increasingly attractive for nineteenth-century Western travelers. Though visited and narrated in Renaissance Europe at least since the times of Buondelmonti, the peninsula had remained outside of traditional Western routes. It had remained a landscape of myth. Thessaly and Macedonia were regarded by their scarce visitors as true paradigms of Ottoman backwardness. These lands presented the European traveler with a number of challenges: brigandage, malaria, plague and other diseases, excessive heat, an obsolete road system, etc. Pirates surrounding the Athonite peninsula were also a constant menace, as was the stormy Aegean itself. Descriptions of violent tempests in which travelers risked their lives became a common topos in the accounts of journeys to Mount Athos, often consciously echoing the story of Mardonius's shipwreck. Traveling to Athos was a complicated issue from a bureaucratic point of view too. Before departing, the traveler needed to obtain a *firmān,* the sultan's written permission to move through his empire. A letter from the patriarch of Constantinople was also necessary to access the peninsula and receive hospitality in the monasteries (this often implied a journey to Constantinople and further delays).[5]

Despite these logistical difficulties, like the Orthodox pilgrims to Athos, the number of Western visitors to the peninsula witnessed an exponential increase in the course of the nineteenth century. Located on the imaginary boundary between the East and the West, Ottoman Athos stirred both Orientalist and classicist taste. From Renaissance emblem, or imaginary landscape, it became

an extraordinary arena for Western erudite practices. In the West, Athos was no longer the utopian island, or the "cabinet of curiosities" item described in island books. European travelers now began to conceptualize and narrate the mountain-peninsula as a sort of space for exhibition.

Unlike Orthodox pilgrims who went to the Holy Mountain to take part in its spiritual life, Western travelers remained outsiders. They remained spiritually detached observers of what they envisaged as a large-scale museum—of classical vestiges and Byzantine buildings, of ancient manuscripts, of picturesque and sublime sceneries, of people. Mount Athos was translated and circulated through poems, paintings, maps, and especially through written accounts for the consumption by both geographically and culturally distant armchair travelers.[6]

Whatever the main goal of their visit, like the pilgrims, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers to Athos generally followed a common itinerary. They usually made a tour of the monasteries and eventually climbed the peak. Their stay was thus characterized by a movement along both horizontal and vertical axes. As they moved *through* the peninsula, the Enlightened traveler observed and recorded, whereas the Romantic visitor enjoyed its picturesque beauty and came into close contact with its "exotic" inhabitants. As they moved *over* it, ascending the peak, the former gained a nearly unique "rationalizing" cartographic perspective, while the latter could abandon his senses to a sublime vertigo, to a pantheistic fusion with nature.

The naturally panoptic physical conformation of the peninsula, topped by the majestic peak, its cartographic finitude as a quasi-insular space, and its monasteries, themselves self-enclosed microcosms, were all elements that encouraged observation. The traveler literally walked through a sequence of "living dioramas" (the life in the monasteries, the fathers working the land, the hermit in the cave, etc.). Once he had reached the summit of Athos, he had attained cartographic knowledge. Paradoxically, Western travelers remained outsiders. For them, Athos remained after all a landscape, or a platform from which they could gaze at "the world as an exhibition."[7]

Moving through Athos

Resurrecting Xerxes' Canal and Other Classical Vestiges

Xerxes' Canal endured on Renaissance maps and in island books as a curiosity, as a moral landmark, as a mythical feature that reinforced, perhaps even

justified, Athos's insularity. Until the late eighteenth century, its presence nevertheless remained purely textual. The French naturalist Pierre Belon, who personally visited the spot in 1547, claimed to have seen "nothing"; as did the celebrated Orientalist and classicist Richard Pococke two centuries thereafter. His visit to the supposed site of Xerxes' Canal and consequent denial of Herodotus's account gave the English scholar the reputation of one of the greatest "skeptic travelers" of all times.[8]

Athos, Pococke recorded, "is a promontory which extends almost directly from north to south, being joined to the continent by a neck of land about a mile wide, thro' which historians say Xerxes cut a channel, in order to carry his army a short way by water, from one bay to the other; which seems very improbable; *nor did I see any sign of such a work.*" For Pococke, visible signs on territory were what really did matter. His empiricism left no space for blind acceptance of written sources. Objectivity derived from visual encounters. The classics were no longer unchallenged literary quotations (as on Coronelli's maps, for example), but a field open to rational inquiry and exploration. Through direct observation of territory, the scholar alternately confirmed and challenged the authority of the "Antients." The eye of Pococke and his contemporaries, however, remained an eye for the most part confined to the surface of territory.[9]

At the turn of the century, a new sport which became known as historical topography stimulated Western scholars and officers to visit the presumed site of Xerxes' Canal. Pioneered by Chandler and Revett, historical topography consisted in the discovery, identification, and survey of classical sites. Confident in the progress of cartographic techniques, the topographers took their task seriously: "sextant and rule in hand, they paced out the Greek countryside, 'settling the geography' of Attica, identifying the site of Dium or Dodona, arguing and even coming to blows at the site of Troy."[10]

Their most popular travel companions were Homer and especially Pausanias, whose *Description of Greece* was indeed the repository of the largest collection of topographical information about ancient Greece. The only "Baedeker" available at the time, it provided Grand Tourists and scholars traveling to Greece with accurate descriptions of buildings and monuments as they had stood in the second century AD, in the manner of a modern guidebook, and thus constituted a fundamental aid for topographers.[11]

These "foot-weary students of the terrain" gathered valuable firsthand information for the compilation of historical atlases. Their meticulous work provided their erudite compatriots, "for whom the Peloponnesian War was

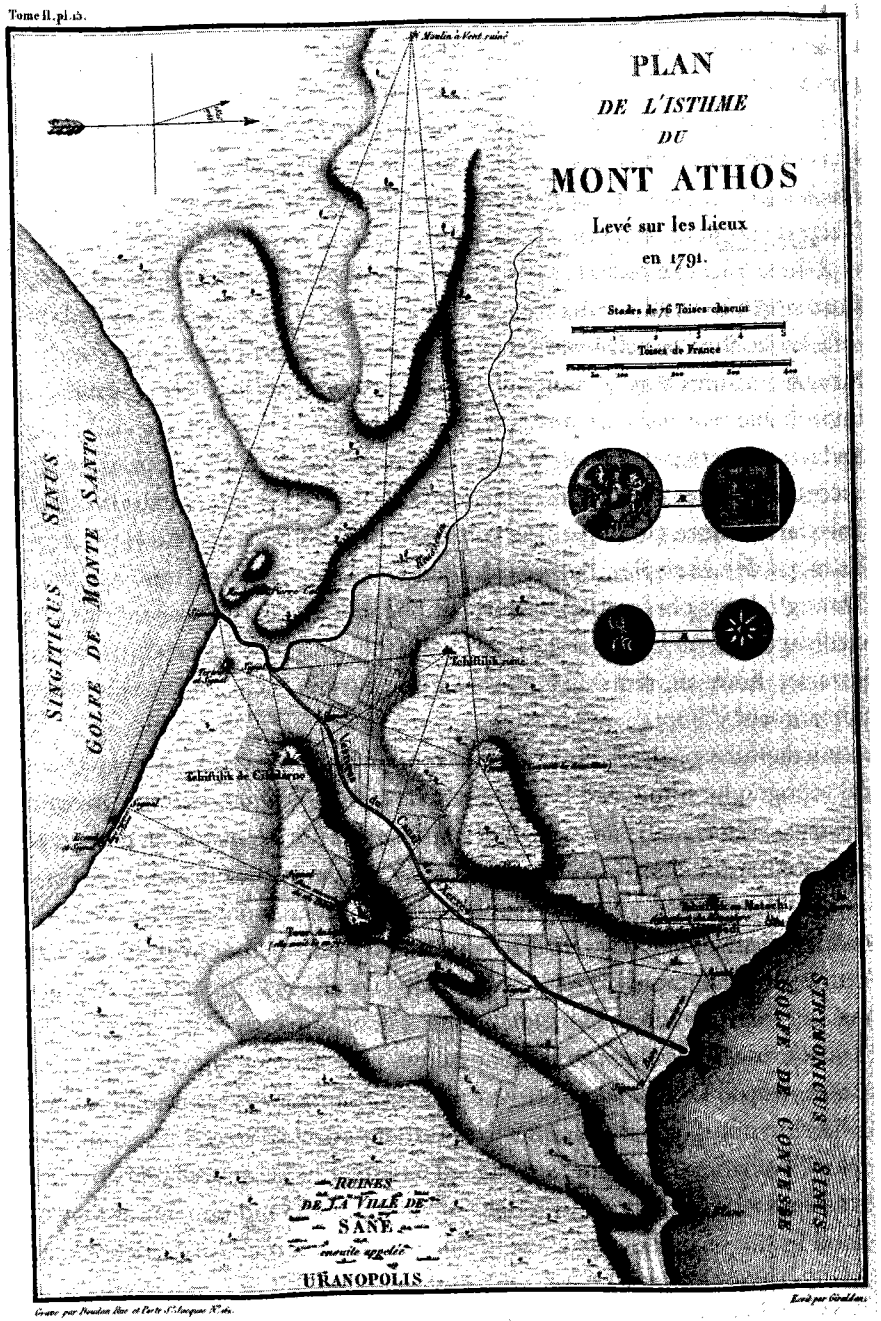


Fig. 37. Plan of Xerxes' Canal in Choiseul-Gouffier's *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce*, 1791. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

more familiar than the history of England," with a new spatial perspective. Nineteenth-century historical geography was the product of the marriage between classical studies as the foundation of Western education, and topography as the "handmaiden of power." On the "scientific" map, past and present collapsed into each another. Historical topographers were rational visionaries. Unlike Pococke's, theirs was a surveying eye that penetrated beyond appearances. It was an eye attracted more by absences than presences. Xerxes' Canal represented a compelling challenge to these scientific minds; it was a puzzle to be solved, but also an invisible object to be brought to life.[12]

With historical topography at its height, the canal did not simply feature on maps. It was systematically surveyed. Its first plan appeared in the second volume of Choiseul-Gouffier's *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce* in 1791 (fig. 37). Marie Gabriel-Florent, Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier, was the French ambassador to the Porte a few years before Lord Elgin took the metopes and frieze and pediment sculptures of the Parthenon to England. The French ambassador was a classicist and *fin connoisseur* in the arts and possessed a collection of antiquities larger than Elgin's itself. Besides gaining a reputation as the man who dreamed of transporting the whole Theseum (the best-preserved ancient Greek temple) from Athens to Paris, Choiseul-Gouffier obtained much of his fame from the publication of the first tome of his influential *Voyage* (1782).[13]

A diplomatic appointment to the Porte offered Choiseul-Gouffier the opportunity to broaden his research and undertake the fieldwork necessary for the compilation of the second volume of his *Voyage*. This was to be pursued within a great scientific expedition, the first of its genre. This mission later served as a model for the legendary Napoleonic expedition to Egypt in 1798, and as an anticipation of the 1830 official French scientific mission to Greece. The Hellenist Le Chevallier, accompanied by the landscape painter de Cassas, had been given the task of finding the site of Ilium, whereas the geographer Barbié du Bocage, from his cabinet in Paris, was responsible for the elaboration of topographic surveys and maps.[14]

Behind its intellectual goals, Choiseul-Gouffier's enterprise aimed at consolidating the ancient liaison between Paris and Constantinople at a time of Ottoman decline and uncertainty. Playing a policy shrewdly opposed to Catherine the Great's imperialist philhellenism, the French ambassador presented the sultan with an image of a glorified ancient Greece as a font of renewal and thus of prosperity for the alliance with the French. At the same time, he opportunistically used the same image in Europe to promote France as the heroic savior of the oppressed Greek nation.[15]

Choiseul-Gouffier and his team of classical scholars and topographers embraced the hard task of rescuing Greece's ancient splendor from its present state of decay. By uncovering ancient ruins and myths from the Greek wasteland, they were hoping to move French public opinion. If Troy, to whose discovery Choiseul-Gouffier was hoping to attach his name, was the most famous and most obvious site for topographical investigation, "Greece altogether was a more exciting prospect." French and English scholars envisaged cities and treasures under what could not be seen on its barren wasteland. Measurements and plans served as a scientific, and thus persuasive, counterpart to paintings of Arcadian landscapes such as those of Valenciennes. The "rhetoric of truth" spoken by maps and surveys uncovered ancient towns from the oblivion of time. It brought myths back to life and gave scientific credibility to an ideal.[16]

Choiseul-Gouffier's plan of Xerxes' Canal was a product of this tradition. The project, however, was not simply antiquarian—it was metaphysical. What Choiseul-Gouffier's civil engineers and military surveyors were seeking to map was not the vestiges of buried ancient towns waiting to be uncovered; it was rather the invisible *non*-presence of a mythical canal, a feature whose presence no longer existed except within classical texts. The mythical canal was an invisible line which the French diplomat and his team envisaged running through the fields, cutting across the neck of the peninsula. It was a geometric line that took life solely on and *from* the map. This became a meeting point for desire and technique; for antiquarian taste and the cartographic "rhetoric of truth."

The map's persuasive power as a scientific statement led the observer to believe that the canal was still there. Coins from the ancient towns on the peninsula were inserted within the accurate survey of the area, as material witnesses of the canal's existence. Isolated as in a museum's showcase, the coins were rationalized under the cartographic gaze of the surveyor. The ferocious beasts represented on the Akánthos drachma were frozen in time. The star of Alexander on another coin was no longer a symbol of supreme power—it was simply an archaeological curiosity.

In 1806, the site of the canal was examined by the man who probably contributed most to historical topography: William Martin Leake, lieutenant-colonel and expert surveyor of the Royal Artillery, "the most indefatigable of all travelers and topographers, Pausanias only excepted." As Richard Stoneman observes, to Leake goes the merit of having established "the location and name of almost every hitherto obscure site of ancient Greece, from the most famous and long-suspected sites to the minutest towns of Epirus, named fleetingly in

Strabo, Livy or some obscurer author and otherwise lost to history. And he was almost always right."[17]

By the time Leake reached the isthmus of the Athonite peninsula, he had taken 1,500 measurements with the sextant and theodolite in the Peloponnese alone. Homer and Herodotus, whom he first encountered as a schoolboy, were living presences in his memory. Pausanias was his Bible; military discipline his trope. "Every morning found him at a new site, and he usually began his journey before dawn, breaking after two or three hours for breakfast . . . and forging ahead until noon or later when the heat dictated a halt. The rest of the day would be devoted to exploring the locality, and reporting on its customs, its produce and prosperity, its government and its antiquities."[18]

On the isthmus of Athos, Leake made no secret of his ambitious fantasies and speculated that Xerxes' Canal might "without much labor, be renewed; and there can be no doubt that it would be useful to the navigation of the Aegean."[19] Leake's words were taken seriously. In 1838, Lieutenant T. A. B. Spratt, another officer of the Crown, was sent "to measure across the Isthmus of Mount Athos, at the spot where the canal was cut by Xerxes." The results of the survey were published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* (1847) along with a detailed map of the isthmus and the presumed canal (fig. 38). Spratt, who had been trained in the classics as a schoolboy and in the inquisitive tradition of Admiral Beaufort (1754–1857) as a junior officer, took a keen interest in the geology and archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean. He spent thirty years in this region, which was at that time the domain of Royal Navy surveyors. As with Leake, Spratt became also involved in the identification of ancient cities.[20]

The report on Xerxes' Canal was meant as an explanation of the map, since, Spratt wrote, "the few remaining traces of this canal may have totally disappeared in another century, when the absence of such evidence might perhaps again produce doubts upon the truth of this historical record." A "careful examination of the locality" and a more "scientific" reworking of Choiseul-Gouffier's plan were to be used to "remove any doubt," returning to Herodotus his ancient authority once and for all.[21]

Spratt's survey was no isolated case. Scientific interest in Xerxes' Canal was paralleled by proposals for the cutting of Suez. De Lesseps's project invited historical geographers like Letronne "to write about the ancient canal, its course, its history of openings, of closings, and the strategic anxieties it had occasioned in the past." Similarly, the French military topographer Élie Roudaire (1836–1885)

Fig. 38. Lieutenant T. Spratt, Plan of the Isthmus of Mount Athos, in *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 1847. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [4856.750000 DSC])

undertook survey work in the region of the Tunisian saline depression on the edge of the Sahara, hoping to resurrect the non-presence of Apollonius Rhodius's mythical Sea of Triton for France's commercial and military benefit.[22]

Spratt's observations opened with a discussion of the feasibility of Xerxes' project on the grounds of the geological and philological evidence: "Herodotus (vii, 23), in his account of the manner of carrying on the work of excavation, shows that no impediment existed in the nature of its ground; for we have an illustration of the softness of the material dug. . . . This fact is confirmed by the geology of the district. The part of the isthmus through which the canal was cut is a bed of tertiary sands and marls, so that the work of the Persian king . . . is really insignificant, as compared with many works that are executed at the present day."[23]

The officer then proceeded with his empirical investigation, enumerating more or less visible "evidences of the canal," such as "a succession of swampy

hollows which run in nearly a straight line across and are from 2 to 8 feet deep, and from 60 to 90 broad," or "the ruins of a city which had escaped former travelers" and which he identified as the ancient Ouranoupolis mentioned by Pliny. The map spoke the language of science. The coins on Choiseul-Gouffier's plan disappeared; they were no longer needed to prove the truth—measurements and geographical features did. The flat surface surveyed by Choiseul-Gouffier's men turned into complex geomorphic terrain. Hachures and watercourses obscured human features. Segmented in five parts, Xerxes' Canal became "more real" than Choiseul-Gouffier's continuous line. The gaps in the canal were left to the viewer's imagination to fill.[24]

These rational searchers of the classical past did not stop at the neck of the Athonite peninsula. The skeptic Richard Pococke, for example, went as far as to Cape Lavra, "the promontory of Nymphaeum of the antients," and discarded another notable mythical non-presence: the shade of Athos reaching to Lemnos. "If we suppose the perpendicular height of [Athos] to be four miles from the sea, tho' I think it cannot be so much, it may be easily computed if its shadow could reach to Lemnos, which, they say, is eighty miles distant, though I believe it is not above twenty leagues," he concluded. Like that of Herodotus, Apollonius Rhodius's authority was confuted on the grounds of rational inquiry and observation.[25]

Lieutenant-Colonel Leake, on the other hand, guided by a mental map constructed from his classical readings, was able to envisage the ancient towns of Athos under the "Byzantine layer." At the harbor of Xēropotámou, he observed "an ancient altar or pedestal on the beach and two or three granite columns in the adjoining valley," whereas embedded in the monastic walls were "two ancient sculptures in low relief . . . one representing a woman seated in an antique chair, with a table before her and a mirror behind the chair; the other [probably] part of a frieze of wrestlers." At Vatopedi, he found "two sepulchral inscriptions in the church," which he accurately transcribed and studied. Near Hilandar, he localized "one of the ancient cities of *Acte*, the situation being . . . one of the most likely from its natural conveniences."[26]

In Erissò, he purchased ancient coins from local villagers. Thanks to their physical durability, coins represented a true mine of historical information. Unlike manuscripts, paintings, or even inscriptions, coins were practically imperishable and easy to circulate. From the number, the material, and the inscriptions on the coins bought in Erissò, Leake was able to elaborate further inferences regarding the location of Athos's ancient cities. But every true

numismatist would sympathize with his sorrow at finding out that most of these coins "were generally converted by the brazier into kettles and caldrons. Alas, *Sane magno mihi erat dolori tantum periisse antiquitatis!*"[27]

If, by the end of his journey through Athos, Leake was able to attempt a reconstruction of the ancient topography of the peninsula, a few decades later another no less enthusiastic classicist sought the ancient heroes of his school days on the sunburned faces of the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain and its surroundings. At the time of his visit to Athos and other mountains "of many memories" in northern Greece, Sir George Ferguson Bowen was secretary of government in the Ionian Islands and president of the University of Corfu. This was an eccentric institution whose original professors wore gorgeous tunics of violet and orange with red leather buskins, and whose founder, Frederick North himself, "caused a sensation by parading about London dressed as Plato."[28]

In the diary of his journey, first published in the *Colonial Church Chronicle* and successively as a book, Bowen was transported through the Athonite peninsula by Romantic pathos and an obsessive passion for antiquity. For the scholar, the inhabitants of Erissò, who caused Leake to weep for the sad fate of the coins turned into kettles, were "like all the other Macedonian peasants, full of Alexander the Great and of Aristotle. Indeed many of them talk as sensibly and accurately of the great hero and the great philosopher of their country, as an educated Englishman can do of Marlborough and Newton." The surroundings of the Monastery of Vatopedi became "groves and gardens which Plato would have preferred to his Academe."[29]

The guards of the Athonite Synod bore names and figures "worthy of the phalanx of Alexander the Great." The monks of Athos spoke a dialect "differing less from the dialect of Xenophon than the English of Pope from the English of Chaucer: pronouncing it not with our rude and barbarous accents, but as their fathers most probably pronounced it before them—with syllables that breathe of the sweet south." Hospitable and welcoming, "the good Fathers everywhere [acted] on the Homeric precept, which bids to 'welcome the coming,—speed the parting guest.'" If their customs had "altered but little since the times of Homer," the owl crying in the woods near the Monastery of Esphigmenou was "the real owl of Minerva, so venerated of old by the Athenians."[30]

Western visionaries trained in the classics were moved even by the rock of Athos. For philhellenes such as the Scotsman David Urquhart, who set out for

the Greek War of Independence in 1827, the mythical mountains of Greece had a peculiar charm: they were immortal monuments of nature and of the nation. As such, Athos itself became a titanic living presence:

> Looking from the mountains of Macedonia, where you embrace at once the whole [Athonite] Peninsula, fore-shortened, it may have the appearance of a man lying on his back; for as the nose and chin would so be raised in the air, and an interval would appear between the chin and the breast, so the elevated portion of the extremity of the mountain seems detached from the rocks that lie below, and which spread on either side as it were the shoulders; then they seem narrow and to rise in the centre and mark the navel; then spread towards the hip; then the abrupt escarpment of a mountain across the isthmus, seems to give the outline of the knees, bent and drawn up; after which the land, suddenly sinking, narrows where the joined feet might be supposed to touch the earth. . . . This . . . must have been the view of Stesicrates when he endeavored to persuade Alexander to complete the resemblance.[31]

Manuscript Hunting

Not only did eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western travelers to Greece walk on a shared map. All of them brought home a small fragment of Greece. With greater or less impunity, "on their way back home, everyone hid in his luggage a piece of marble, a small bas-relief, an inscription, or ancient coins." Fallen prey to what James Clifford named "the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world," many objects of antiquity silently found their way to the great European capitals: London, Paris, Vienna, etc. At their final destination, they were accurately catalogued and located within the showcases of museums and private collections—self-enclosed microcosms for visual consumption.[32]

While Russian pilgrims longed for a blessing from the Holy Mountain, Western collectors were after exclusive "antiques." Unlike pilgrims, western Europeans traveled to and through Athos not to participate, but rather to appropriate, to possess—conceptually, visually, and physically. While Sevastianov appropriated Byzantine objects to consolidate the Russians' status as the "true inheritors of Orthodoxy," Western collectors were guided by pure aesthetic

taste, or interest in the classics. They valued Athos as a jewel box, rather than as a sacred place—one in which thousands of treasures had accumulated through the centuries.

Ancient manuscripts had been stirring Western imagination and desire more than any other treasure on Athos. The monasteries of the Holy Mountain had contained libraries since their foundation. Unlike the libraries of most Byzantine monasteries in the Ottoman Empire, however, those on Athos escaped destruction and large-scale pillaging thanks to the peninsula's special autonomous status. In 1867, Victor Langlois observed how "among all the literary repositories of the Orient, the libraries of Mount Athos are certainly the richest in Greek and Slavic manuscripts."[33]

Manuscript hunters had been attracted to Athos since the times of Ciriaco d'Ancona (who visited in 1444–45). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western scholars and collectors were still dreaming of discovering some unknown classical text which would make them famous, or some illuminated manuscript to enrich their collections. In this context, Athos was conceptualized, experienced, and narrated as a true "treasure island."[34]

In 1705, Paul Lucas, the last emissary of Louis XIV dispatched to the Levant to collect antiquities, defined those places on Athos "not monasteries, but fortresses." In the first three decades of the eighteenth century, the thick walls of the "fortresses" were repeatedly penetrated by the emissaries of the royal librarian Abbé Bignon, and by those of his rival, Prince Nikolaos Mavrokordatos of Wallachia, the first Phanariot ruler that succeeded Constantin Brancovan. By the end of the century, the libraries of the Holy Mountain were swamped by a new wave of manuscript hunters.[35]

Scholars from France, England, even Sicily commented on the "deplorable" conditions in which the manuscripts were kept, and used the "ignorance" of the monks as an excuse to justify their actions. The famous Hellenist Jean-Baptiste d'Ansse de Villoison, a member of Choiseul-Gouffier's expedition, declared the ferocious manuscript-eating worms to be "one of the greatest disgraces of the Levant." Almost one century thereafter, his compatriot Eugène Melchior de Vogüé accused the monks of using pieces of manuscript as tasty baits for fishing. For the Sicilian gentleman traveler Alessandro Bisani, who visited Athos in 1788, the clouds hiding the summit of Athos's rocky colossus served to conceal its embarrassment at the ignorance of its occupants.[36]

In the early nineteenth century, two English scholars, Dr. Philip Hunt and Rev. J. D. Carlyle, spent three entire weeks on Athos examining its libraries and

compiling the first systematic report on their conditions. This formidable duo had a reputation in England: Hunt was responsible for the removal of the best metopes from the Parthenon on Elgin's commission; Carlyle, another of Elgin's faithful emissaries in charge of "collecting manuscripts wherever possible," was a professor of Arabic at Cambridge.[37]

At the beginning of his account, Hunt immediately distinguished himself and his companion from the mass of "uncivilized and noisy pilgrims" crowding Athos at Easter. Rather than "humble participants," the two English scholars regarded themselves as heroes challenging various impediments in order to access and catalogue the manuscripts:[38]

> After our tedious abode at Lemnos, and the violence of the storm which we had experienced, we were gratified in no common degree with the view of the convent of Vatopedi. . . . We had reached a small creek at the foot of it, but the surf was so high that we scrambled with difficulty over the rocks. . . . On reaching the gate [of the monastery] we found the approach more like that of a fortress than the peaceful abode of monks. The lofty walls were flanked with towers, and many cannons appeared at the embrasures. The outer gate was doubly plated with iron; a long dark winding passage led from it, in which were two guns on carriages and three more gates secured by strong bolts and bars.[39]

Mount Athos entered the Western geographical imagination as an uncharted treasure island dotted with impenetrable fortresses, mainly through the account of Robert Curzon. The second son of Viscount Asheton de la Zouche, Curzon was probably the most fanatic bibliomaniac to set foot on the peninsula. His *mal di carta* was comparable to Pope Alexander VII's stony disease. After a catastrophic undergraduate career in classics at Oxford, Curzon perhaps sought to redeem himself through extensive traveling through the monasteries of the Levant in search of ancient manuscripts. The resulting account became an instant best seller for Victorian gentlemen thirsty for travel anecdotes and picturesque descriptions. Translated into German and French, Curzon's book spread a new image of Athos across Europe.[40]

The English bibliomaniac started his *periplus* of Athos's libraries in the spring of 1837. In Curzon's rhetoric, landing on Athos was like landing on the remote islands described by Defoe or Swift during the previous century. Among the monks, Curzon described himself as a sort of Gulliver. Though seemingly disappointed when they found that the Englishman had "no tail or

horns," the monks, who "had never seen a Frank before," treated "the milordos" with great respect, staring at him and crossing themselves "as the unknown animal passed by," Curzon wrote.[41]

Curzon's activity on Athos was restless and dense with pathos. He hopped from one monastery to the next, entertaining, like his predecessors, "the perpetual, if fading, hope that they would find some famous lost book of antiquity." To his "heroic mission" Curzon also attributed a moral value. The English collector considered himself as "a sort of biblical knight errant, who had entered on the perilous adventure of Mount Athos to rescue from the thraldom of ignorant monks these fair vellum volumes, with their bright illuminations and velvet dresses and jeweled clasps, which for so many centuries had lain imprisoned in their dark monastic dungeons."[42]

The metaphor was well suited for a Victorian audience used to, and indeed charmed by medieval chivalry and Gothic architecture. Athos's monasteries-fortresses were turned into treasure houses full of traps and hidden dangers. At the Lavra, Curzon had to face armies of fierce bugs, "small and active creatures who have the audacity to bring their wives and large families within the very precincts of the monastery." Sometimes his epic narrative assumed the gloomy tones of a gothic novel. The "biblical knight errant" witnessed bloody "tomicides" (the pitiless cannibalization of manuscripts), anathemas, pirate incursions, and not least, exhausting bargaining with astute monks.[43]

The Athonite peninsula constituted an ideal setting for Curzon's chanson de geste. Its monasteries were "like palaces of a fairy tale, complementing the beauty of Athos." Their fortified walls and dungeons hid treasures to be found and stories to be narrated. Their dark spaces transported the reader into a chivalric poem. Rare illuminated manuscripts took the place of beautiful jeweled princesses locked in the castle's tower and waiting to be saved. "Ignorant monks" were substituted for dragons, giants, or gnomes guarding the treasure. The peninsula itself was turned into a self-contained little kingdom, as in a fairy tale, rather than a holy place or the classical land described by Leake and Bowen. On the peninsula, the charming natural scenarios were intertwined with the treacherous paths throughout which the "biblical errant-knight" moved in pursuit of new treasures:[44]

> On one of the narrowest and loftiest [ledges of rock], as I was trotting merrily along thinking of nothing but the beauty of the hour and the scene, my mule stopped short in a place where the path was about a foot wide, and, standing upon three legs, proceeded deliberately to scratch his nose with the fourth. I was too old a mountain traveler to have hold of the bridle, which was safely belayed to the pack-saddle; I sat still for fear of making him lose his balance. . . . I was at the time half inclined to believe that he knew he had a heretic upon his back, and had made up his mind to send me and himself smashing down among the distant rocks.[45]

Searchers of the Picturesque

As Robin Cormack observed, half of the romance of Curzon's book derived from the exotic settings in which the bibliomaniac's "planned treasure hunting" took place. *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* was conceived at first for "the lovers of the picturesque." The monasteries of the East, Curzon argued, had a peculiar charm, because of "the beautiful situations in which they are almost invariably placed." In Uvedale Price's original conception, the picturesque was about relationships between things, and especially between landscape and buildings, complementing and embellishing each other, like verdant Athos and its monasteries. Irregular landscape scenes were also picturesque, especially when they included natural objects "not arranged to make a composition that is soft and smooth, neither . . . grand and overpowering."[46]

For Curzon and other nineteenth-century travelers to Athos, the "picturesque" went beyond its visual connotation—"being like a picture." On his way to the Monastery of Karakállou, Curzon did not simply admire Athos's picturesque scenery—he moved *through* it. He did not merely look at a picture or at a sequence of pictures; his moving body was rather immersed in a sort of 360° diorama: "The dark blue sea was on my right, at about two miles distance; the rocky path over which I passed was of white alabaster with brown and yellow veins; odoriferous evergreen shrubs were all around."[47]

Unlike classical beauty, which invites a distanced, almost passive contemplation, or the sublime, which relies on visually and mentally ungraspable enormity, the picturesque required a mobile bodily engagement. It implied "that active pursuit of pleasure, when the fibres are braced by a keen air, in a wild, romantic situation, when the activity of the body almost keeps peace with that of the mind, and eagerly . . . explores every new recess." Curzon's body moved through the picturesque irregularities of Athonite geological and vegetal forms. The Englishman moved through Athos, not only in pursuit of

manuscripts, but, like any picturesque tourist of his time, in search of novelty, of the curious, of perpetual surprise, "seeking delightful agitation."[48]

More or less consciously, nineteenth-century travelers to Athos were all "searchers of the picturesque," for wandering through Athos was itself a picturesque activity. Picturesque foreshortenings appeared also in Leake's, or Hunt and Carlyle's scholarly reports, as peaceful interludes in their erudite activities on the peninsula. The dynamic combination of vegetation, water, and rock exercised a sort of "healing effect" on the reader. Hunt and Carlyle's hot and fatiguing walk to Saint Paul Monastery, for example, was rewarded not so much by its manuscripts as by the "picturesque effect of the scenery around [the monastery] much increased by the view of a torrent which comes from the mountain, and tumbling from rock to rock, and occasionally covered by woods, here enters the sea almost in a foam." If Curzon's picturesque was the product of his movement through relatively static irregular forms, Hunt and Carlyle's was rather the effect produced by a landscape in motion, by a breathing Athos.[49]

Athos's combinations of rock, wood, and water, "hardly to be seen elsewhere," certainly contributed to the increasing number of European tourists to that location over the second half of the nineteenth century, when a wealth of first-person travel accounts as well as improved transportation brought Athos closer to Europe. In 1889, Athelstan Riley, an Anglican layman active in ecclesiastical affairs and later an antiquarian and historian of the English Hymnal, defined Athos as "a mountain and a garden in the sea." For Riley, Athos was "naturally picturesque" because its cone and its verdure represented an element of rupture, of surprise on the uniform surface of the "Classical Aegean." But the peninsula as experienced from within was also a continuous surprise: it was eternal and unexpected, immutable and pulsating with life; it was a geographical object, an ensemble of objects, and a feeling, all at once.[50]

Athonite nature constituted only half of the "picturesque surprise" for nineteenth-century travelers. What gave them the most pleasure was the combination of natural elements with the ancient buildings that occupied the most unexpected locations. Rivaling Price's conception, which regarded the picturesque as a purely aesthetic response to nature, Richard Payne Knight argued that scenes acquired their picturesqueness from their intellectual associations. Emphasizing the human/historical element, this conception prevailed among nineteenth-century "picturesque tourists" to Greece. Curzon, for example,

dedicated a whole paragraph to a tall Byzantine square tower "projecting marble rock above the calm blue sea at the South East corner of the peninsula. . . . The quaint half-Eastern, half-Norman architecture of the little fortress, my outlandish vessel, the brilliant colours of the sailors' dresses, the rich vegetation and the great tufts of flowers which grew in crevices of the white marble, formed altogether one of the most picturesque scenes it was ever my good fortune to behold."[51]

The vitality of vegetation unexpectedly spreading out from the crevices of immortal stone produced surprise and admiration. But the Byzantine tower was an interesting and surprising object in itself. Curzon's description of the tower as "half-Eastern, half-Norman" well epitomized the Victorian attitude toward Byzantine architecture. For the British gentleman and his contemporaries, steeped in the classics since childhood, the art of Byzantium represented something "outside of the canons," a curious hybrid hard to define. In the Greek landscape, Byzantine churches appeared to Western eyes as interruptions in the proportion, symmetry, and grace of classical temples.[52]

As a category, "the Byzantine" was as problematic as Greece itself, neither fully Eastern nor Western, although, as Ramsay asserted in 1890, "the late Byzantine period was characterized by its 'Oriental character' and each of the imperial dynasties was less 'Western' than the preceding one." Because of their supposed physical and metaphysical irregularities, Byzantine buildings were at their best regarded as picturesque supplements to classical monuments, and at their worst as degenerated forms of art, "in every respect inferior to that of the West." It was as late as 1889 that the Annual General Assembly of the British School at Athens declared its renewed interest in the Byzantine period. But even then, for the gentlemen educated in the classics who conducted their lives in the moralizing grandeur of the neoclassical buildings in the European capitals, Byzantine monuments remained for the most part nothing more than picturesque curiosities.[53]

Mount Athos entered the European imagination as a picturesque landscape mainly through late-nineteenth-century popular literature. Texts such as Leo de Colange's *Picturesque Russia and Greece* (1886) described Athos as "one of the most interesting little corners of Europe," grouping monasteries like Hilandar, with its "exquisite background of foliages and picturesquely irregular roofs and cupolas." For the French geographer Elisée Reclus, the monasteries of Mount Athos, "with their high walls and strong towers . . . are exceedingly

picturesque." Like Greece itself, Athos was a sort of southern version of northern Europe, reflecting at the same time a picturesque "little corner of the Orient."[54]

The picturesque was not only a matter of aesthetic taste. It was linked to spontaneity—the spontaneity of some long-lost golden stage of Western civilization. The picturesque fed Romantic nostalgia, and Romantic nostalgia moved hundreds of British and French tourists to the farthest recesses of the Mediterranean, in search of "picturesque situations." As they traveled around Greece, they "envisaged themselves remaining within the bounds of a familiar culture *at the same time* as Greece was defined in dichotomous terms as an exotic, Asiatic Other." Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Athos epitomized this exotic otherness and the vestiges of a shared archaic past all at once. For the picturesque tourist, traveling to Mount Athos meant getting in direct contact with the "curious" customs of the Ottoman "Orient"; it also meant traveling back in time, in search of "a lost part of one's self." Such was the ambiguous attitude of Western travelers to Athos, despising the monks for their supposed superstitious ignorance, but at the same time marveling at their "primitive" faith.[55]

While these seemingly contrasting feelings pervaded most nineteenth-century accounts of Europeans traveling to Athos, their trope varied according to the origin of the authors. Many accounts reflected something of the divide between the French idealism and English pragmatism highlighted by Edward Said in the Orientalist writings of the period, such as Chateaubriand's and Edward Lane's, for example. While generally critical toward the monks and Orthodoxy, the French and the English picturesque travelers moving through Athos (more or less consciously) envisioned a trace of their common spiritual origins among the greenery and the rocks: a sort of unlearned prerational Christianity. But where the English were guided by supposedly rational observation, sometimes even backed by scientific speculation, the French were transported by a gloomy melancholy, by a sense of loss and disorientation.[56]

In a long article in the January 1892 issue of *Harper's*, Vicomte Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, a French noble and one of the main authorities on Russian literary criticism, alerted Anglophone literati to an imminent "change of direction" among the intellectual elite of the young French generation. The Voltairianism that had dominated the first half of the century and science as "the official religion of the French government" were both in decline. Rationalists, skeptics, atheists, the minds that are most emancipated from religious beliefs, he argued, were returning "by a different route to the state of thought of an

Indian yogi, of an Egyptian anchorite of the second century, or of a scholastic monk of the eleventh century." If outside of France this return to spirituality had assumed rather different shades, in his home country it meant a "subterranean" revival of "the primitive evangelical tradition."[57]

By the time this article appeared in *Harper's*, de Vogüé had acquired first-hand experience of different forms of Christian mysticism through his extensive travels to Orthodox Russia and the Levant. In 1887, he published a three-hundred-page account of his *Voyage aux pays du passé*, namely Syria, Palestine, and Mount Athos. Going to Mount Athos, he argued, was like plunging into the twelfth century. A sense of mystery pervaded his narration, the same "eternal mystery" he felt awakening in the souls of his young compatriots in 1892. His first approach to Athos was "une vision dantesque et la lutte de la raison contre une réalité plus chimérique que tous les rêves." The monks waiting for the boat on the pier became ghostly figures, "spectres noirs et muets, glissent avec des allures de fantômes."[58]

Everything on Athos was surrounded by a melancholic halo; everything spoke of a timeless nostalgia. The "natural picturesque" hid the "cadavre social qui y a élu son tombeau"; the "Byzantine picturesque" narrated the glorious origins and the lamentable decadence of Eastern religious painting; the monks conducted their spectral existences suspended in the eternal temporal dimension of contemplative mysticism. De Vogüé's Athos was a physical place reached after a long journey, but it was also a distant region of his mind. The ambiguous dimension onto which the vicomte projected the peninsula and its inhabitants blurred the boundaries between past and present, reality and imagination, landscape and self. The macabre images Athos awakened in him hid an anxiety—the anxiety of a generation in search of existential answers.[59]

Though attracted by the same "picturesque objects" (the scenery, the castle-like monasteries, the solitary hermit, etc.), the gaze of British travelers on Athos was free of de Vogüé's melancholic patina. For a late-eighteenth-century Grand Tourist like the young John Beacon Sawrey Morritt, a Greek priest was simply "dirty, sycophantish, and ignorant." In the course of the following century, however, curiosity penetrated "dirt, sycophancy and ignorance," and Athonite monks came to embody a "backward otherness" nevertheless deserving closer examination. "Oriental" Patristic spirituality was continuously opposed to "Occidental" Thomistic rationality, but from a standpoint different from de Vogüé's—that of empirical observation and science.[60]

When it came to defining Athonite religious life, even Sir George Ferguson Bowen, the "classical visionary," anticipated Semple's environmentalist claims that "man is the product of the earth's surface" and that the desert, "where the watching of grazing herds gives . . . leisure for contemplation," is the home of monotheism. "In the primitive ages of the church," Bowen wrote, "religious societies were set up as depositories of virtue and piety, and not of learning. The Eastern then, rather than the Western monks, kept close to the example of the early founders of the monastic system. . . . The earliest monks renounced literature altogether, devoting themselves entirely to religious exercises, and to *that contemplation which suits so well the climate of the East, and the temperament of Orientals*" (fig. 39).[61]

Contemplation suited "so well" the Oriental type and climate because of its passivity. Bowen made no reference to physical work, the most crucial aspect in the life of Saint Athanasius and the base of Athonite monasticism. Hard work and physical toil—a potential threat to the "idle and passive oriental character"—here were substituted with generic "religious exercises." This romanticized "illiterate" but "contemplative" monasticism was implicitly opposed to a "rational" Western Christianity armed with the "weapons of learning," and thus represented in the Western popular imagination as the active and progressive partner. According to Bowen, Eastern Christians were passively shaped by "the climate of the East" in the same way nineteenth-century Western Christians (Roman Catholic or Protestant) were able "to combat the pernicious influence of the Tropics."[62]

For both French and English, Athos constituted a unique space for self-display. Bowen praised the significance of Athos for the picturesque tourist and the antiquarian, who would "revel in a perfect cabinet of Byzantine monuments, charters, and imperial seals, illuminated manuscripts, elaborate reliquaries, paintings, forms of architecture, and the like." But, he argued, the main beneficiary of a visit to the Holy Mountain was the ecclesiastical student, who "will find the religion of the middle ages still living and breathing in the nineteenth century."[63]

Late in the nineteenth century, Athos was still narrated in popular literature as a "living museum," exhibiting "in one view all the different phases of Eastern monastic life," from the simple hermit dwelling in a cave, like the early fathers of the desert, to the most sophisticated manifestations of coenobitic and idiorrhythmic life. For the Western scholar of religions, Athos thus represented a unique diorama in which his historical readings could be materialized. There

Fig. 39. The Holy Council of Karyés, in E. M. de Vogüé, *Syrie, Palestine, Mont Athos: Voyage aux pays du passé* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1887).

the scholar could closely examine the complex Byzantine rituals, and appreciate their ancient origins.[64]

From his position of "privileged" observer, the Western scholar on Athos moved through a closed cartographic space similar to that of museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and, of course, the great world exhibitions, little self-contained microcosms increasingly familiar to both Victorians and Parisians. World exhibitions were spaces which grouped different exotic objects and people arranged them in order to "set the world up as a picture." The link between these artificial microcosms and Athos's picturesque "natural microcosm" was not only conceptual. The ephemeral "islands of representation" floating in the heart of Paris communicated with the Athonite "millennial quasi-island" through small objects—the same blessings purchased by Orthodox pilgrims. In 1855, for example, de Colange observed an Athonite monk exhibiting "at the French Exposition carved work in wood which Veit Stoss himself might have been proud to own," and in 1861, the cleric and classicist Henry Fanshawe Tozer saw one of these elaborate artifacts being prepared for the Great Exhibition of 1862.[65]

The most "sophisticated" monks of Athos, on the other hand, came in touch with the outside world through foreign visitors and through the newspapers

which from time to time reached some of the monasteries. The health of the queen of England, Victor Emmanuel and the state of Italy, the war in America, the Atlantic telegraph, and the Suez Canal were all matters of conversation between the Athonite intellectual elite and British visitors. And yet, Tozer noted, "all these things, no doubt, were regarded from a very distant point of view: indeed, it is the effect of a secluded spot, like the Holy Mountain, where the routine of life is so unexciting, and the pulse of life seems to beat faintly, to make even a stranger look upon the events of the world around as through a veil." Absorbed by the slow rhythm of their routine, faint like the rest of the Ottoman Empire, imprisoned by a cloud of "Oriental lethargy," the monks could not pierce that veil. Only the rational Western traveler could see on both sides of the curtain: he could do so thanks to his Apollonian gaze, combined with his ability to move through and *over* Athos.[66]

Moving over Athos

Approaching and Ascending Athos

Athos was an evocative geographical object for nineteenth-century scholars. It allowed free play to their geographical imagination. For the French archaeologist Adolphe Napoléon Didron, the Athonite peninsula, with its high peak, mirrored the shape of a domed Byzantine basilica; both of them were physical vessels sailing toward eternal life. For Elisée Reclus, the Chalkidikē was a huge hand spread into the waters of the Aegean, and Athos a finger pointing at Constantinople and its lost glory. Under the spell of nineteenth-century aegyptomania, the French geographer also envisioned Mount Athos as a mysterious Sphinx, and its pinnacle as a high obelisk, like those recently raised in the squares of the great European capitals. For most Romantic-era travelers, however, Athos remained one of the great mythical mountains of ancient Greece. It was one of the "mountains of many memories" bounding their visual and imaginative horizons.[67]

Athos and other mountains of Greek mythology had occupied Western erudite imagination for centuries. An early yet paradigmatic example is to be found in Petrarch's famous ascent of Mount Ventoux in 1336. Petrarch's motivation to climb the Provencal peak—"to see what so great elevation had to offer"—has been traditionally regarded as the mark of a new, distinctively modern humanistic 'rational' spirit. On the summit of Ventoux the Italian poet and humanist

was reminded of Olympus and Athos: "At first, owing to the unaccustomed quality of the air and the effect of the great sweep of view spread out before me, I stood like one dazed. I beheld the clouds under our feet, and what I had read of Athos and Olympus seemed less incredible as I myself witnessed the same things from a mountain of less fame."[68]

The "Herculean lure" of mythical mountains became a true obsession for Romantic alpinists. By the late nineteenth century, mountain climbing had become a fashionable sport among the British. Ascending exotic or mythical peaks involved the active and simultaneous interconnection of moral, aesthetic, and physical energies. Mountain climbing abroad enabled British young men to construct assertive masculinity to uphold their imagined sense of British imperial power. The mountain turned into a sort of moral headmaster, "teaching its students the virtues that were supposed to make them truly men: brotherhood, discipline, selflessness, fortitude, sang-froid."[69]

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, books on mountain climbing had become part of British popular literature. In 1876, Joel Tyler Headley, the author of *Mountain Adventures in Various Parts of the World,* confidently argued that "the adventurous spirit of man has enabled him to overcome apparently insuperable obstacles, and reach the top of almost every high mountain on the globe." But for more than one century, mountains also had been considered as one of the most consistently Romantic landscapes. Mountain climbing as a sport originated with the Romantic movement, when Western imagination was learning "to feel through the eyes," and the "rational Beautiful" was being gradually supplanted by the "irrational Sublime." The Romantic deification of nature, the pantheistic interfusion of real and ideal, natural and supernatural, finite and infinite led to the Ruskinian notion that "mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery."[70]

As Lord Byron emblematically stated, "mountains are a feeling." Rising from the earth, and drawing their gigantic outlines along the sky, they revealed "in their broken twisted strata the omnipotent power that piled them so high into [the] heavens"; they were "not the result of the lawless action of blind forces; but of infinite wisdom." For Romantic mountain climbers, classical mountains spoke of the dawn of Western civilization and of the origins of the world. Their majestic masses evocatively combined what Marjorie Hope Nicolson named the "Power of Nature" and the "Power of Ruins." "Great landmarks to the eye," Headley wrote, "many of them [provided] great landmarks in human history." If, since the times of Petrarch, Western scholars had been acquainted with

Ossa, Pelion, Rhodope, Athos, and other classical mountains as literary quotations, in the nineteenth century, British "vertiginous empiricism" was pushing many scholars to their summits. If for Alexander Pope it was "absolutely necessary" to pass through the Alps to be able to describe rocks and precipices, the late-nineteenth-century traveler to Greece and the Levant felt morally obliged to enter into physical contact with classical peaks, in order to "feel history."[71]

Most nineteenth-century Western travelers to Athos hoped to ascend its mighty peak. This, however, was a demanding task. It required good physical training and the assistance of expert guides (usually monks and muleteers from Lavra, or other monasteries in proximity of the cone). Changeable weather, frequent storms, and the presence of snow often rendered the ascent dangerous, if not prohibitive. Many travelers had to give up, but others succeeded and left often very accurate written accounts of their ascents. We learn, for example, that at the end of August 1889, Riley gained the summit from the Romanian Skētē of St. John the Forerunner in approximately seven hours, an estimate which finds validation in present-day climbers' reports.[72]

Of course, Western visitors were not the only, nor the first ones who ventured to the summit. Testimonies of ascents by monks survive from as early as the ninth century. A rare account of an early ascent in adverse weather conditions is narrated in the *vita* of St. Euthymios the Younger (AD 823–898). The saint had attempted to dissuade his brethren from making the ascent, for which he could see no justification, but they stubbornly insisted despite the wintry weather. The monks ended up being caught in a snowstorm and would have died of the cold if Euthymios (who apparently had decided to accompany them) had not managed to kindle a fire by merely blowing on a pile of firewood.[73]

For Athonite saints the summit of the Holy Mountain was a place for divine revelation. Here, in the fourteenth century, St. Maximos Kausokalyviótēs was fed by the Virgin with heavenly bread after he endured demons and thunderstorms in a three-day solitary vigil. Here, after a night of prayer, the sixteenth-century martyr monk James, whose soul "had already climbed Mount Tabor and saw the spiritual Jerusalem," had a vision in which he was told to go to Aetolia, where he died as a martyr. Finally, on the summit of Athos St. Euthymius the Georgian (AD 955–1028) served a liturgy in which "everyone who was there was covered with a heavenly light which made them fall down, unable to endure the brightness."[74]

For over a thousand years, monks climbed the Holy Mountain on individual retreats, in imitation of Moses, or (more commonly) to celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration in the small chapel on the summit on August 6 (August 19 with the Julian calendar).[75] Western travelers, by contrast, did not ascend the Holy Mountain for religious practice or spiritual purposes (even if they sometimes climbed together with celebrating monks). For some, the ascent of the peak was simply an intense aesthetic experience, a sort of pantheistic interfusion with nature during which they would walk through a "succession of sublime Alpine sceneries;" for others, it was an intellectual (rather than spiritual) challenge. Most of these travelers were attracted by the possibility of conquering the view from one of "the most remarkable mountains in the world." They found their reward in the cartographic "view from above."[76]

For the Romantic traveler, the physical ascent of the peak was only the last stage of a longer venture. The vertical movement over the rock was anticipated by a long horizontal approach. Physical contact with the sublime peak was preceded by its being sighted from the boat or from the coast. Ascending Athos was therefore a physical and cognitive process intertwining imagination and visualization, alternating micro and macro scales, involving different angles and perspectives.

Athos's outline looming on the horizon captured Western travelers' eye. As for Russian pilgrims, it represented a powerful vision of desire. To Morritt, sailing off the island of Lemnos, Athos appeared as "one of the greatest single objects I ever saw. It rises in a high, conical form from the sea, and as you don't see the continuation of the land, the end of the promontory, being towards the island, is very striking. The mountain is extremely high, and, rising immediately from the water with no surrounding objects, seems still higher." For the young English Grand Tourist, Athos surpassed even the Alps, uniting "every beauty of the wildest and grandest sort to those of the finest and most fertile countries." From Sigeum, Athos provided Rev. Edward Daniel Clarke, a Cambridge classicist and mineralogist visiting in the early nineteenth century, with "a proof of the possible extent of vision in the clear atmosphere of the country, which would hardly be credited without ocular demonstration." From Pieria, it looked "like an island," "its triple summit appearing so distinctly to the eye that [he] was enabled to make a drawing of it."[77]

Sailing from the Thermaic Gulf, Doctor Holland, Queen Victoria's physician, envisioned over the other two fingers of the Chalkidikē "the lofty pinnacle

of Athos rising in the distance; appearing from this point of view as a vast insulated cone, with a smaller conical eminence arising from one of its sides." But approaching Athos by sea involved more than sight:

> On the night of the 6th, a high wind came upon us from the south-west, and we were driven so far to the eastward of our course, that the following morning we found ourselves not far distant from the promontory of Mount Athos, which rose mystically through the dark and broken clouds that hung upon its sides. At noon, after a gloomy half an hour, the wind suddenly went round to the north, and within twenty minutes of its commencement, blew with an extreme degree of violence. . . . At eight o' clock our situation became extremely critical; the night dark; a tempest of wind; thick sleet of snow; a high sea; and the vessel drifting upon a steep rocky coast. . . . We were summoned by the captain to prepare for the worst.[78]

Lord Byron's vision of Athos was less dramatic. The English poet never visited the Holy Mountain, but his ship got fairly close, probably on a quiet evening on his way back from Constantinople in 1810. While in his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Athos figured as a simple erudite quotation, as a titanic presence "roaring" amidst the other mythical mountains of Greece, the close view of the mountain moved the author to dedicate an entire poem to it:[79]

> Beside the confines of the Aegean Main,
> Where northward Macedonia bounds the flood,
> And views opposed the Asiatic plain,
> Where once the pride of lofty Ilium stood,
> Like the great Father of the giant brood,
> With lowering port majestic Athos stands,
> Crowned with the verdure of eternal wood,
> As yet unspoiled by sacrilegious hands,
> And throws his mighty shade o'er seas and distant lands.
> . . . . . .
> Where air and sea with rocks and woods conspire
> To breathe a sweet religious calm around,
> Weaning thoughts from every low desire,
> And the wild waves that break with murmuring sound
> Along the rocky shore proclaim it holy ground.[80]

As the boat comes closer to the shore, ancient Athos becomes the Holy Mountain. The sublime geographical object turns into a peaceful place for meditation.

Later travelers to Athos often narrated the view of its cone from a distance as the "irrational" counterpart of their "dioramic" experience from within. From the plain of Troy, Athos's pyramidal outline towered up from the horizon, Tozer wrote, "like a vast spirit of the waters." Its lower slopes melted "into purple haze, while its summit [assumed an] unearthly, ethereal, lilac-gray tinge." For those approaching from the sea, Athos, in its paradoxical stillness, was pure landscape, an unreachable object of desire, an ineffable chimera: "it was no easy matter to get to the land of the monks, though under its very shadow, it seemed as far away as ever," Riley recorded.[81]

For its climbers, however, Athos was a sublime living presence. The summit of Athos, Urquhart recounts, emerged from the "singular and beautiful confusion" of the surrounding ground as a Platonic object of heavenly perfection: "to the south, in the clear sky, sits on its throne of rocks, the Holy Mountain. But who could describe the effects of light mist, and clouds, as they mingled on that majestic summit? Gauzy vapours, now hanging in midair, stretched in parallel lines, at morning dawn, in perfect stillness; sometimes it stood like a column, supporting a roof of clouds, and sometimes like new mountains, they were heaped upon it."[82]

Those who managed to reach Athos's summit described it as an almost unearthly place. The peak opened the Romantic traveler to new spatial dimensions, ranging from the sublime infinite to the rationalizing Apollonian gaze. After challenging "tremendous precipices," Tozer reached it on the feast of the Transfiguration:

> Until at last, as the vigil service lasted the whole night, I betook myself to a small crevice in the rock, where I slept, wrapped in my plaid, for a couple of hours; after which I lay awake, gazing up into the bright heaven, and feeling the strange sensation of being elevated to a rocky pinnacle, with nothing but sea and sky around—*caelum undique et undique pontus*. . . . When the sun rose, the shadow of the peak was projected over the sea and land to the west, in a distinctly-marked pyramid; but daylight added little to the view, as the greater part of the peninsulas of Athos and Sithonia had been visible during the night. Eight of the monasteries, however could be distinguished, and the expanse of sea was an extraordinary sight. On a clear day, both Ida and Olympus may be seen.[83]

Tozer's bodily engagement shifted from physical contact with rock to a sublime connection with heaven. Sea and sky projected the English traveler into the realm of infinity. Physical landmarks (Sithōnía, Ida, Olympus, etc.) bounded his visual horizon, while their immutability and mythical associations opened him up to the Romantic dimension of boundless time.

Surveying and Charting Athos

Given its unique position and visibility, Athos's peak inevitably became a primary site for triangulation, as well as a key feature on charts of the Archipelago. With Xerxes' Canal, it represented a main attraction for British officers. During his visit to Athos in 1806, Leake had himself hoped to ascend the mountain to take angles, which would tie its position in with points in Greece and Asia Minor, but he was prevented from doing so by high winds. Thirty years later, Lieutenant Webber Smith ventured forth in another such attempt.[84]

Webber Smith lamented that classical Greece had formed the subject of many recent descriptions and much research, but "still it seems that greater attention has been paid to its classical and antiquarian topics than to the physical geography of the country," especially in its Ottoman-dominated eastern regions. The officer sought to contribute to filling this gap with his personal observations. As he traveled from Istanbul to Thessalonica, he visited Athos's monasteries and ascended its peak:

> June 2.—Fine clear morning: started for the ascent of Mount Athos, the monks kindly furnishing mules and a guide. Immediately on leaving Lavra, the path winds round the southern slope of the mountain, at about 600 feet above the sea. . . . By a rugged, but well-wooded path . . . we wound round to the north-west side of the mountain where the scenery at once assumes a different character, and the ascent commences over almost precipitous rocks. Immediately over our heads a broad belt of foliage, above which is seen the bare conical peak of Athos, without a tree or a shrub to break its well-defined outline.[85]

Webber Smith was fascinated by the grandeur of the cone, gazed at by so many sailors of different times and nations, and more recently accurately surveyed by his compatriots. For nineteenth-century European surveyors, Athos was more than a fundamental seamark for navigation: it was a remarkable landmark in their geographical imagination. As William Henry Smyth (another hydrographer of the Royal Navy) recorded in his *Mediterranean Memoir,* Athos "has been considered an extraordinary mount in all ages; among the ancients, from the fancies of Xerxes, Dinocrates, and those who told of its extravagant elevation; and among the moderns, from its numerous churches, monasteries and monks."[86]

As a professional surveyor, Webber Smith was attracted to the possibility of commanding with a single gaze the coasts and seamarks he had viewed from the sea during his journey, or had seen on the chart, or simply had read of. His was, however, only a "partial conquest" of Athos. After a three-and-a-half-hour march, the officer reached "the foot of the barren cone of white limestone which forms the summit of the mountain," and there he eventually decided to stop his ascent: "The road hence is no longer practicable for mules, and my Albanian guide refused to accompany me any further. He said it would take an hour and a half to reach the summit. I scrambled up for some distance, but found it very fatiguing, and not safe alone, and unfortunately the day was hazy, as is almost always the case during summer in Greece, and thus I should not have been able to see distant objects."[87]

Captain Guattier of the French navy exploited Athos's peak as a station for triangulation, during his 1818–19 operations. Guattier's astronomical observations and trigonometrical positions were used by the British Hydrographical Office to construct a general chart of the Aegean Archipelago (fig. 40). This map resulted from the joint British and the French efforts to chart the Mediterranean in the period known as Pax Britannica. From 1815 to 1900, using British naval supremacy as the instrument, freedom of the seas to all was encouraged, and Admiralty charts were made available to sailors of all nations. Charting the Mediterranean had a peculiar significance for the British and the French. In the introduction to his *Mediterranean Memoir,* William Henry Smyth defined the basin as "the actual site where the intellectual culture to which we are most directly indebted was first developed . . . the grand object of traveling [on whose shores . . .] were the four great empires of the world [. . . and from where] almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above savages, has come." Charting the Eastern Mediterranean region was thus a military, scientific, and erudite enterprise.[88]

Smyth got acquainted with Guattier during his Mediterranean surveys. In 1816, the two met in Malta and had the chance to compare their findings, noting with satisfaction "a fair agreement wherever [they] observed on shore." The two kept exchanging data and observations during their surveys in the Eastern

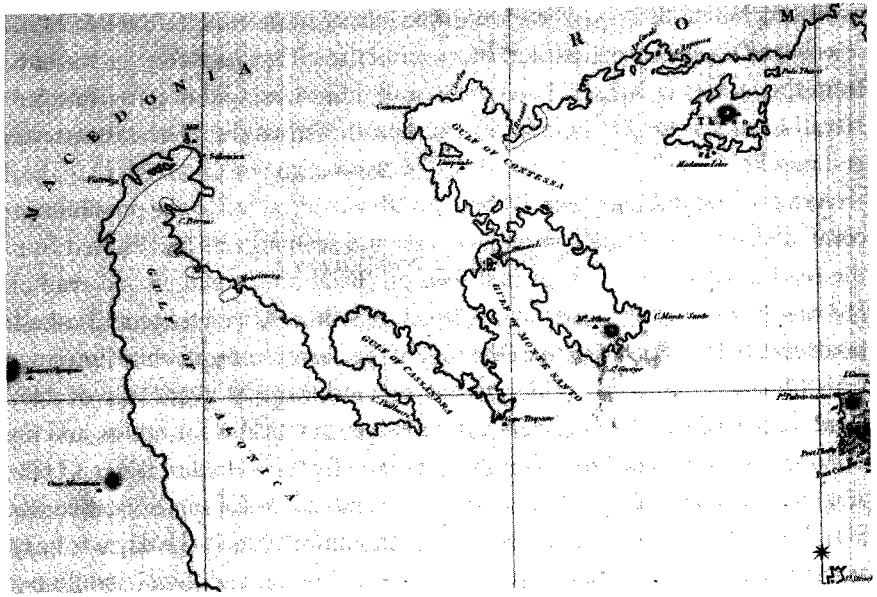


Fig. 40. Detail from Guattier's chart of the Aegean, 1818–19. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [Maps Sec. 5.216])

Mediterranean. The *General Chart of the Archipelago, or Greek Islands* marked an initial stage of this Anglo-French cooperation. The chart was "merely intended for a ship's course from Island to Island, the particular surveys not being yet completed." It displayed the Athonite peninsula in its typical eighteenth-century large rectangular shape, closer to an island than to its actual form. It would take at least another decade and the efforts of a group of energetic British surveyors to correct it.[89]

By the time Lieutenant Webber Smith was contemplating the rocky cone of Athos in "its solitary magnificence," its height had been established by Captain Richard Copeland, who was also responsible for the measurement of the other great mythical mountains of northern Greece. Copeland commenced his survey at the Island of Cerigo (Cythera) and carried the examination to the entrance of the Dardanelles. With Spratt, the British surveyor of Xerxes' Canal, Copeland contributed to a set of extremely detailed charts of the northern Aegean. The British captain employed the methods of the celebrated French surveyor Charles François Beautemps-Beaupré. These were illustrated in a treatise which Copeland translated into English. In his *Introduction to the Practice of*

Nautical Surveying, and the Construction of Charts, Beautemps-Beaupré guided his readers in the practice of surveying step by step, through examples taken from his own experience.[90]

Chart drawing rested on sounding, triangulation, and coastal sketching, all operations made possible by a dynamic dialogue between the surveyor's eye and the coastline, his mind and the compass, his vessel and the sea. Beautemps-Beaupré recommended that one "never lose sight of the land during the continuance of the survey." A number of stations, usually corresponding to "the most remarkable objects situated near the horizon," were to be selected, and the angular distance between them measured. Before the operations, Beautemps-Beaupré suggested drawing light coastal sketches: these provided the surveyor with "the incalculable advantage of having always before [his] eyes, in constructing his charts, the objects exactly as they appeared at the time of observation."[91]

Copeland's charts summarized the various stages described by the French hydrographer. On sheet n.3 of the archipelago, for example, numbers, hachures, and names suddenly crowded Guattier's empty spaces (fig. 41). While on Guattier's chart, Athos differentiated itself from the other two fingers of the Chalkidikē two-dimensionally (that is, in terms of shape), here it was its three-dimensionality that set the peninsula apart. A fourth dimension—that of history and myth—also contributed to Athos's uniqueness, as the "Isthmus of Xerxes" provocatively testified. Coastal profiles also appeared on the chart, with the cone of Athos now dominating the scene, now looming on the horizon beyond the flat peninsula of Kassandra, as a safe landmark—as an eternal beacon directing sailors, and reassuring surveyors.

Copeland's engagement with Athos was not purely visual. In October 1831, after sounding the depths surrounding the southern extremity of the peninsula, the captain decided to land and venture to the peak. Webber Smith recorded the following with admiration, and perhaps also with a little bit of envy: "He [Copeland] had his theodolite, &c., conveyed to the summit, as I am informed by an officer who was employed on the survey, and took the angles between Pelion, Ossa, Olympus, Pierus, &c., with the bearings of all the mountain peaks, islands, headlands, capes, &c., within a radius of at least ninety miles; a glorious and beautiful panorama, such as few positions on the face of this habitable globe can offer." On the bottom left corner of the third sheet of the archipelago chart, the great mythical mountains Copeland gazed at and measured from the

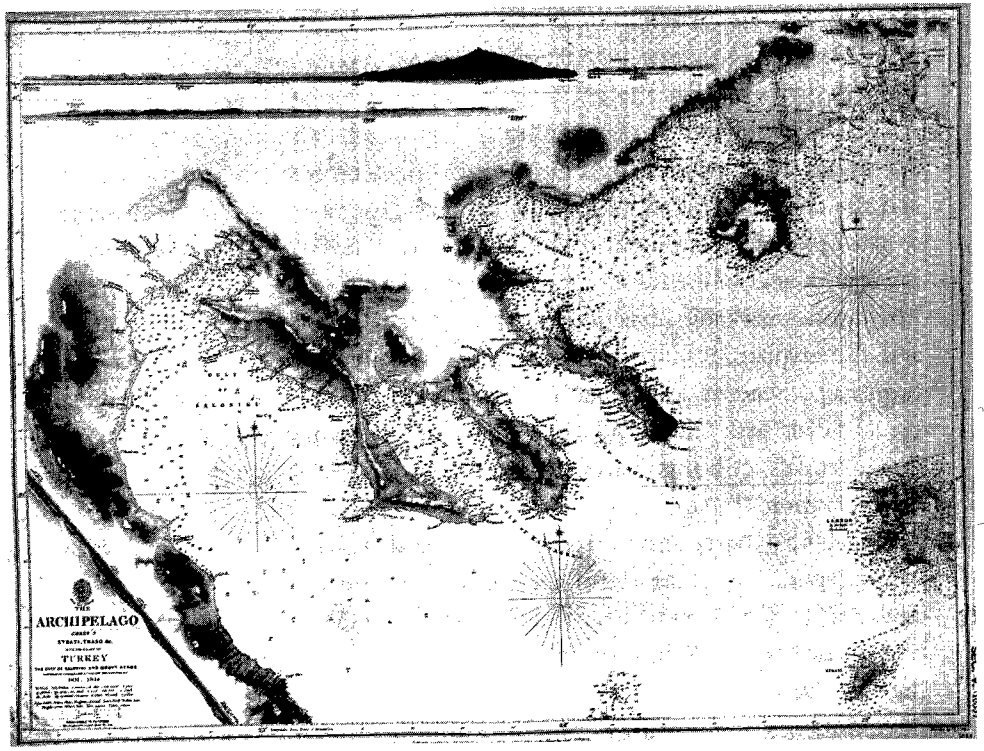


Fig. 41. Royal Navy survey chart of the Aegean archipelago, sheet 3: Strati, Thaso &c. with the Gulf of Saloniki and Mount Athos, 1831–44. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [Maps Sec 5.1523])

summit of Athos were suggestively lined on the horizon, in correspondence to their locations on the map. The sailor was therefore provided with a simultaneous view from the sea and view from above of the most remarkable mountains of Greece.[92]

Physically connected by its waters, and visually by its famous mountain-landmark, the Aegean Archipelago was an ideal field for survey. Yet, it was difficult, almost impossible, to divorce the territory from its classical past, scientific knowledge from myth, the visible from the invisible. Copeland, but especially Spratt, Leake, and the other surveyors involved in mapping Xerxes' Canal, tried to dominate myth through the measurement of legendary physical landmarks. In those years, however, their rationalizing work was being paralleled by that of a man who walked in the opposite direction: this man was the painter Edward Lear, whose lifelong passion was "poetical topography."

Painting Athos

Lear also went to Athos and did his own survey of the peninsula. Unlike Copeland and Webber Smith, he traveled on foot or on horseback, usually alone or with a servant. Unlike the hydrographers, Susan Hyman comments, "of [the] world's great travelers Lear was the most improbable, suffering from bronchitis, asthma, epilepsy and strange overpowering sadness, being prone to severe seasickness, and terrified of dogs, horses and firearms." Nor did he possess the classical education of Colonel Leake, whose topographical work he so greatly admired. From a financial point of view, Lear was also quite disabled. Nevertheless, he managed to enter into the annals of the great Victorian travelers to the Levant, having spent most of his peripatetic life abroad in a continuous search for "the riches of the far-away Landscape."[93]

If for the British officers, voyaging was a mission and for their compatriot travelers a pleasure, for Lear "movement was a constitutional necessity; strenuous exercise contained the epileptic attacks and the stimulus of new settings was an effective antidote to melancholy." His search for the exotic, the sublime, and the picturesque led the painter as far as India and Egypt, although his true love remained Greece and the Levant. Every winter from 1856 to 1863, Lear made Corfu his home and studio. His 1848 and 1849 journeys through the Ottoman Balkans resulted in his *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania* (1851). By the end of his peregrinations in those "strange lands," he had produced several hundred landscape sketches of places few Europeans had seen.[94]

Echoing Lieutenant Webber Smith, Lear complained that Greece, the most fashionable and narrated destination in those years, was also the "most imperfectly illustrated." At the time when the British and French hydrographers' ambition of charting the entire Mediterranean was becoming a reality, and the shores of Greece were being accurately triangulated, Lear conceived his great dream: to publish a general "Topography of Greece." Lear had even contemplated a series of illustrations for Leake's scholarly topographical surveys.[95] For the English painter, however, "topography" meant ultimately "poetical topography," or, in his words, the combination of "poetical treatment with topographical accuracy."[96] Greece, a land where place-names were "not common names," where every scene had "its own link with some historic or poetic association," represented the perfect ground not only for hydrographical survey, but also for "poetical topography." For the lonely and often depressed painter, the sunny landscapes of Greece were not only beautiful: they spoke to him of a

collective golden age, but also of his own "lost mythical past." Where the military surveyors sought to chart territory, Lear charted his own feelings *through* territory.[97]

The artist first tried to visit Athos in the autumn of 1848, but a wave of cholera which was then infesting Thessalonica prevented the realization of his plans. "The monks of Mount Athos had utterly prohibited all communication between their peninsula and the infected city. . . . Mount Athos was shut; the west coast of the gulf was tabooed." In spring, Lear decided to try again. "With a feeling of attraction towards new scenes" and "visions of Athos still [floating] before [him]," he decided to go to Volos and from thence to sail to the Holy Mountain. But heavy rain and southerly winds made him "once and for altogether . . . give up all idea of sailing to Athos. . . . Alas! The woes of Thessaly! . . . Mount Athos! Mount Athos! All my toil has been in vain, and I shall now most possibly never see you more!" For eight long years, Athos remained a mirage, a phantom, an obsession. The majestic cone Lear saw on the horizon from hills near Thessalonica never ceased to exercise its spell over him. It kept looming on the horizons of his poetic imagination as an unreachable object of desire, until 1856.[98]

On August 31 of that year, the "poetical topographer" eventually reached the coasts of the peninsula, and Athos, formerly an elusive landscape, became a "real place" he could walk on, in search of evocative views. Lear was personally acquainted with most of his compatriots who had ventured, or were to venture, to Athos: Leake, Spratt, Urquhart, Tozer, Holland, Bowen, and Curzon. He had attentively read Curzon's book, and knew that the peninsula was full of "immense" and "very picturesque" monasteries. As he wrote to his sister Ann, he intended to "go to all, & draw all, & most probably publish all." Lear realized his ambitious plans within a three-week time frame, but not without difficulties, such as an attack of high fever and the near-death of his servant.

Lear utterly disliked monastic life. He wrote to a friend in Corfu:[99]

> I would not go again to the Agios Oros for any money, so gloomy, so shockingly unnatural, so lonely, so lying, so untenably odious seems to me all the atmosphere of such monkery. . . . More pleasing in the sight of Almighty I really believe, & more like what Jesus Christ intended man to become, is an honest Turk with 6 wives, or a Jew working hard to feed his little old clo' babbies, than these muttering, miserable, mutton-hating, man-avoiding, misogynic, morose & merriment-marring, monotoning, many-mule-making, mocking, mournful, minced-fish & marmalade masticating Monx. Poor old pigs! Yet one or two were kind enough in their way, dirty as they were: but it is not them, it is their system I rail at.[100]

Churches and icons were not spared either. "I always asked to see churches—more to please my hosts than myself,—for I can assure you 20 Greek churches—one just like another—are a task—& I listened meekly to the dreadful nonsense stories they told me of this or that picture . . . [one] they declared to have been painted by the Almighty himself!!! As it is about only 8 or 900 years old and very ill done—the blasphemy is almost lost in the absurdity of the matter. Oh these candles! & ostrich eggs!—& gold & silver & paintings!!—oh Holy Mountain! What have I not suffered to get drawings of you!"[101]

Lear's attitude toward Athos was that of the "rational" enlightened Westerner toward the "irrational" East. It was a confrontation between Protestantism and the mysticism of Byzantium, neither comprehending the other. But if life inside those "villages in a box" that were monasteries repulsed the artist, their "wondrous and picturesque" view from outside, as combined with the "abundantly & exquisitely glorious & stupendous scenery of the mountain" repaid all his toils.[102]

Like Spratt's or Copeland's surveys, Lear's poetical topography was dependent on visibility. More than just works of art, Lear's sketches of the monasteries served as a visual logbook of his journey. Lear never failed to record the date and location of his drawings, and when details or colors were not drawn in, he left them as annotations (fig. 42). His writing became part of his drawing; topographical names and numbers were integrated in a fashion similar to surveyors' coastal sketches and charts. The observation points from which Lear painted his views were selected with the same accuracy as Copeland's "stations," as was the moment of the day. Like a true naval surveyor, Lear found himself sketching Athos not only ashore, but also from the sea: "On the morning of the 26th—I was on the deck long before daylight—to see the great Mt. Athos, below which the steamer goes on her way to Cavalla. And here I made my last sketch of the Holy Mountain rising most magnificently from the calm sea. The sun rose as we were close to Lavra—& I could see every one of the eastern monasteries, so that for an hour, it was like reading the heading chapter, or the index to the last 3 weeks of my life." Where Copeland or Webber Smith visually embraced weeks of journey from the summit of Athos, for Lear the portrait of the sublime mountain rising from the calm sea, or seen in the distance on the horizon, constituted the best epilogue to his topographical journey.[103]

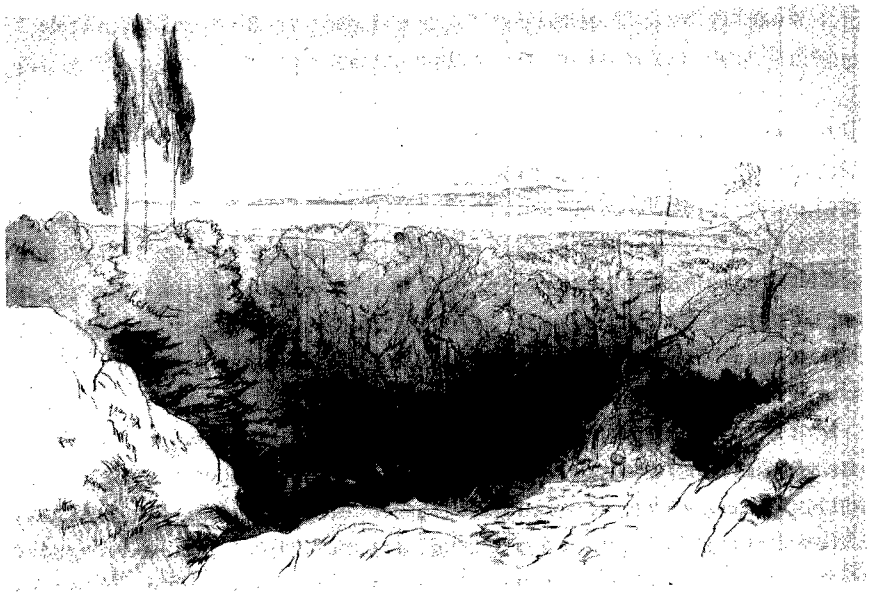


Fig. 42. Edward Lear, *View of Mount Athos from above Iscoro,* 1856. (The British Embassy in Athens © Crown copyright: UK Government Art Collection)

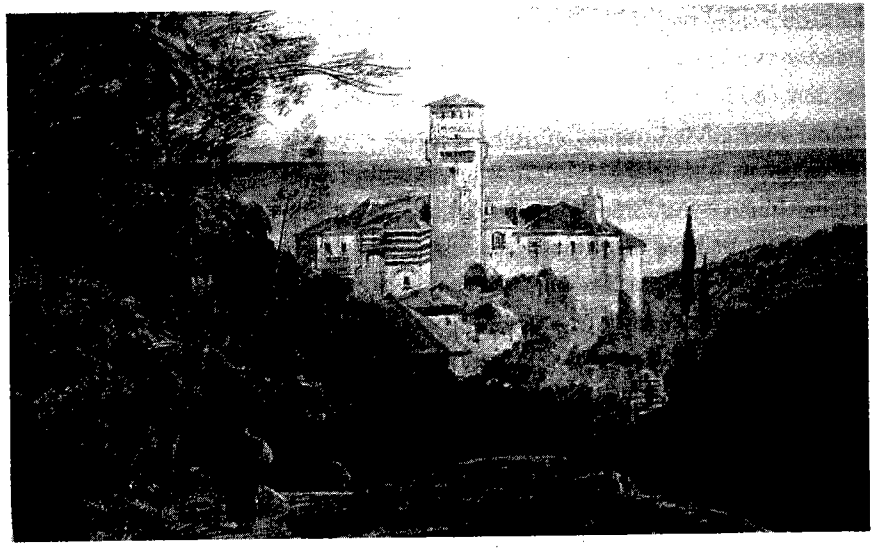


Fig. 43. Edward Lear, *Monastery of Karakallou,* 1856. (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

But the relationship between the poetical topographer and the landscape was far more complex. The panoptic presence of "the great peak of Athos towering over all things" both disturbed and fascinated Lear. Its sublimity bewildered him. It oppressed his rational mind, and yet at the same time freed his poetic imagination—it became a metaphor for his experience of the peninsula. Through his Athonite drawings, the artist sought to make landscape speak of his outer and inner experience. Every Athonite drawing metaphorically embodied his own existential paradox: the closed space of the monastery, perceived by Lear as claustrophobic, was always set against the sublime verticality of the peak, or, more frequently, against the stillness of the horizon (fig. 43).[104]

The Victorians had a special fascination with the horizon, for they felt it marked "not just the edge of the visible, but suggested futurity, the space into which the imagination and inner vision may travel." The horizon called upon Royal Navy surveyors to set sail into uncharted seas, to new coasts to be explored and measured. In Lear's sketches, the horizon brought together "the reach of the gaze and the desire to see beyond its physical limitations." On Copeland and Webber Smith's chart (fig. 41), Athos appeared as a dark, well-defined landmark emerging from the flat sea surface, a reassuring presence grasped and measured from the boat. In Lear's coastal views of Athos sketched from the heights above Thessalonica, Iscoro, or Eriligova (fig. 42), the profile of the Holy Mountain stood on the horizon like a distant mirage, like a dreamscape. If in Lear's "view from the boat," the Holy Mountain towered in all its rocky majesty, in all its insistent materiality, then in the views from the continent, it became an almost imperceptible presence; a "mathematical" ghostly presence contrasting with the chaotic dark bushes in the foreground.[105]

Once Athos had been physically reached, once the dream had become reality and pure vision had turned into hard rock, however, Lear felt an extraordinary void. He could not find psychological comfort walking through the landscape, for "the word 'alone' in Mt. Athos has a far deeper sense than anywhere else. Oh dear! How terribly lonely I felt that place. . . . [I]f one should meet in the 6 hour walk with a Caloyer—I knew well he would only mutter prayers & say—'how should I know?' to whatever question I asked him." The horizon, the blue infinite horizon remained the poetical topographer's only consolation. In its reassuring stillness, it comforted him and made him promises; it called the artist to keep moving. But this time it was an empty horizon. Lear indeed kept traveling; he went as far as Palestine, Corsica, and India, but he ended his life in solitude. For him, Athos had remained an obsession until the end.[106]

5

GEOPOLITICAL ATHOS

In his 1938 essay "Geography and Foreign Policy," Nicholas Spykman, Yale's Sterling Professor of International Relations known as the "godfather of containment," declared geography "the most fundamental conditioning factor in the formulation of national policy because it is the most permanent." Ministers come and ministers go, he argued, "even dictators die, *but mountain ranges stand unperturbed.*" Spykman's use of mountains was no mere rhetoric. It concealed a more profound drama—the drama of modernity. For Spykman, mouthpiece of this epoch of unprecedented geopolitical and technological change, mountains represented secure anchors in a world with no more blank spaces to explore and yet dynamic, even vertiginous, as never before. Spykman's was the "closed world" envisioned by Sir Halford Mackinder, in which "every explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos, will be sharply re-echoed from the far sides of the globe." It was a world shrunk by efficient railway systems, steamers, and airliners, but also by the telegraph, the radio, and the telephone; a world which had experienced the turmoil of the first worldwide conflict and was about to enter the second.[1]

During the first half of the twentieth century, Mount Athos found itself at the heart of one of the most dynamic, if not explosive, regions of this "closed world." The Great Powers were preparing to scramble for the Ottoman Empire's corpse, while the Balkan countries were bursting under the wave of

nationalisms. Geopoliticians and strategists felt that the Balkan Peninsula, the so-called "powder keg of Europe," was "predestined by its geographical situation to play a most important role as the link between the continents and the cultures of the East and the West . . . but also [as] the theater of never-ending bloody clashes and conflicts." By 1941, the region had been invaded "three times as much as any other part of Europe."[2]

The immutable cone of Athos emerging from the dark Aegean was to witness many storms. Racial tensions and internal disputes had started to grip the peninsula in the mid-nineteenth century with the "Russian boom." By the first quarter of the twentieth century, Mount Athos, for the first time, found itself on the table of the Great Powers, experienced physical occupation by foreign troops, and saw drastic modifications of its political boundaries.

On November 2, 1912, a few weeks after the outbreak of the First Balkan War between the Balkan League (Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania) and Turkey, four ships from the fleet of Admiral Kondouriotēs dropped anchor at the Athonite port of Daphnē. The Turkish *aga* was arrested, and Athos was officially liberated from its half millennium of Ottoman occupation. On November 26, seventy Bulgarian troops landed on the peninsula and entrenched themselves in the Bulgarian and Serbian monasteries of Zografou and Hilandar, declaring that they needed to protect Bulgarian interests and property on Athos. The troops were stationed for seven months, until the eve of the Second Balkan War, which saw Greece and its Balkan allies unite against Bulgaria. On the eve of the declaration of war with Bulgaria, the two Slav monasteries were besieged and the Bulgarian occupiers deported to Piraeus. Subsequently, Russia took a far deeper interest in the Holy Mountain and rendered the "Athos question" an international one. At the Conference of Ambassadors in 1913, the Russian representative proposed that Athos become an international neutral protectorate governed by an international commission (Russia, of course, having the predominating influence). No decision was taken, leaving Athos in a provisional and undefined state of neutrality, and giving way to a series of Greek-Russian negotiations. These were interrupted with the outbreak of the First World War.[3]

After being in abeyance for seven years, during which the peninsula had been in fact a part of the kingdom of Greece, the Athos problem was raised again in the postwar settlement with Turkey. By then Russia had become a Communist state and lost any interest in the Holy Mountain, to which the dramatic decrease of Russian monks and the decay of their monasteries sadly

testified. The Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) expressly recognized full Greek sovereignty over the peninsula, nevertheless requesting that the status of non-Greek monasteries remain unaltered. After the great defeat suffered by the Greeks at the hands of the Turks in 1922, two hundred thousand acres of land in proximity of the isthmus were expropriated by the Greek state for the Greek Orthodox refugees from Asia Minor, causing the recession of Athos's boundary toward the interior of the peninsula. Throughout the German occupation of Greece during World War II, Athos retained its special status. German troops did not interfere with the community's internal affairs, and, thanks to the secret cooperation of the monks, the Holy Mountain turned into a gateway to freedom for dozens of Allied soldiers escaping from occupied Greece to Egypt.[4]

Besides experiencing territorial changes for the fist time in its history, in those years Athos started to be narrated through new metaphors and in a new language. This was the language of modernity, of globalization, of geopolitics; a language that worked through the civil society of the Great Powers and spread across the globe at the speed of airplanes and radio waves. It was a pervasive language that disrupted physical, social, and academic boundaries—hence my characterization as "geopolitical Athos."[5]

The German strategist Karl Haushofer (1869–1946) envisioned geopolitics as "an objective science based on the study of the natural phenomena and the laws of nature"; a science that studied states as biological organisms in competition for "living space." John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge termed this phase of modern geopolitical discourse "naturalized geopolitics." "Natural" was not only the language adopted by professional political geographers. "Nature" offered also, and more significantly, a normalizing vision of world order. The health of a state-organism was valued on the basis of its territorial expansion.[6]

Thanks to its unique legal status and the astute diplomacy displayed by the monks, the Holy Mountain was not directly or visibly affected by the two world wars. The redrawing of the boundary, the transitory presence of foreign troops on the peninsula, not to mention the early-twentieth-century internal ethnical struggles were all micro-events when compared to the drama taking place in the outside world. Officers, scholars, and journalists traveling to the Holy Mountain continued in their belief that time had stopped there. A bizarre throwback to the past, only partially penetrated by fragments of modernity,

Athos was opposed to the vital dynamism of surrounding Europe, to the supposedly natural growth of the "healthy" Great Powers.[7]

Early-Twentieth-Century Athos

Athos, Modernity, and Geopolitics

At the outbreak of the First Balkan War, Mount Athos lay just forty-eight hours by rail and steamer from Vienna. As Frederick William Hasluck, the librarian and assistant director of the British School at Athens, observed: "much of the difficulty and not a little of the romance of a pilgrimage to Athos has vanished with the coming of steam. It is steam to-day that brings you to Thessalonica, whether you travel by land or by water, and steam that carries you down the long bay [the Singitic Gulf]." For Hasluck, Mount Athos was no longer a geographically remote island suspended amidst the fog of the Western imagination. Nor was it a fieldwork arena accessible only to a few intrepid scholars. It was an easily reachable living archive, where the British scholar could validate most of the data he had collected in the library of the British School, while preparing the first comprehensive travel guide to the Holy Mountain.[8]

The Athos experienced by Hasluck in the early twentieth century presented some differences from that of his predecessors (that is, the Athos he read about in the school's library). The reader, he wrote, "would now find strange contrasts on [his] pious, learned, or merely curious voyage. Russian pilgrims, it may be, in sheepskin coats and high boots, jostling journalists and insurance agents—. . . nowadays monks subscribe to papers and insure their lives." The greatest contrast for Hasluck, however, remained that between the peninsula and the world surrounding it. "Once landed you are quit of modernity," he observed; "there are few reminders at all of the outside world, and those few are for the most part confined to the shops—such as they are—at the port and at the village capital. Here you find such things as tea (probably an innovation of the Russians), various kinds of tinned fish, and even condensed milk and picture-postcards, besides the necessaries of life. But these are incidental anachronisms." These fragments of modernity on the Holy Mountain were for Hasluck and his contemporaries just reminders of an outside world in which Athos was an "incidental anachronism."[9]

In the early twentieth century, the image of Mount Athos as a curious

anachronism reached the most recondite corners of civil society in the closed globe's leading geopolitical units. In a 1913 paper read to the Ladies' Automobile Club in London, Athos was presented as a living fragment of an ancestral past, "when European civilization was in the making"; a fragment accidentally embedded in the turmoil of one of the most dynamic geopolitical regions of the globe: "at the present moment almost the only spot in what we know as the Near East upon which the fierce glare of politics or warfare is not actually concentrated." In 1916, the September issue of *National Geographic* magazine talked about "illusion of the past," and sarcastically warned "feminists, suffragettes, and ladies militant of the Western world, that here is a stronghold secure against your attacks . . . [for] even the furred and feathered colonists of Mt. Athos are supposed to leave their harems home."[10]

One of the most ubiquitous sources of information about the world in early-twentieth-century American culture, the *National Geographic* magazine was deeply committed to modern progress. The magazine buttressed "America's vision of its newly ascendant place in the world" through what it viewed as the objective presentation of various exotic, backward othernesses. Photoreportages featuring racial and cultural stereotypes from distant countries were intended to show American readers how far they had come. Gendering was just another way to exoticize. If Philippine young mothers in their traditional dresses and naked African women were easy targets for masculinist objectification, Mount Athos could be constructed just as easily as a feminist target: as a forbidden landscape of desire which would deliberately irritate emancipated American women, and would be perceived as anachronism by any modern Western reader. By portraying Athos as an antifeminist medieval enclave, the *National Geographic* transformed the Holy Mountain into one of the many "exotic others" scattered around the world.[11]

Photography froze black-robbed monks within the walls of their thousand-year-old institutions. It introduced a supposedly real Athos into the houses of millions of armchair travelers. Historical curiosity mixed with current international policy. It also mixed with ecological and racial theories. In the Western popular imagination, Athos was not only a womenless fossil immune from progress; it was a biologically odd organism in every respect. A British staff officer speculated that "there must be something in the air of Mount Athos conducive to the growth of hair and beards. If the secret could only be discovered by some enterprising American he would speedily make his fortune."[12]

For Hasluck, Athos was far from being an "Oriental," monolithic fragment,

as it was usually envisaged and narrated by the travelers of the previous century. On the wave of contemporary racial theories and the geopolitical debates concerning the Balkan region, the British librarian took a serious interest in the ethnic composition of Athos's population. As in the past, the monks retained their home citizenship (Ottoman, Greek, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, or Serbian). Nationality and language, Hasluck observed, conditioned the prospective monk's choice of monastery. "The broad division is between Greeks of Greece and Greeks of what was formerly Turkey: in Lavra, where the community is a mixed one, master and pupil must be of the same nationality. Vatopedi admits only Ottoman Greeks and these are mostly from the Chalkidikē, and most other monasteries have their local preferences."[13]

The Athos visited by Hasluck was in reality a complex microcosm which reflected the intricate geopolitical scenario of the Balkans. At the turn of the century, the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire were fuzzy and artificial to the eyes of Western observers. The Balkan nation-states at the fringes of the empire were still in the process of becoming. Serbians had gained substantial territory during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78). Greece acquired Thessaly in 1881, and four years later Bulgaria (an autonomous principality since 1878) incorporated the formerly distinct province of Eastern Rumelia. All three Balkan states and Montenegro hoped to incorporate additional territories from the Ottoman-ruled Rumelia (a region that included Eastern Rumelia, Albania, Macedonia, and Thrace).

The imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire was thus greeted by these states as an opportunity to restore their territory. Ethnically, however, the region was extremely fragmented. Groups such as the Greeks were dispersed and hardly mappable within distinctive boundaries. Macedonia featured as a center of particular discord. During the first decade of the twentieth century, rival Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Turkish nationalist groups competed for supremacy over this region. They claimed the right not only to the land but also to its inhabitants, as each group regarded them as a subset of their own peoples. These claims resulted in continuous tensions, explosions of violence, and eventually in an intense propaganda war. The Macedonian question remained unsolved even after the First Balkan War and the liberation of the Balkans from the Turks. By the time of Hasluck's visit to Athos, Macedonia was thus still characterized by "a patchwork of antagonistic ethnic communities; a diversity that gave its name to *macédoine*, a salad of mixed fruit or vegetables."[14]

LA TRIBUNA ILLUSTRATA

Supplemento illustrato della "Tribuna"

Anno XXIV - N. 7 — 13-20 febbraio 1916 — Anno XXIV - N. 7

Il grande Atlante della guerra: Carta del Montenegro

Riflessi di guerra su pacifici recessi: i monaci bulgari del monastero di Zagraphu, servendosi di ogni mezzo, dalla scopa al fuoco, dal badile alla piccozza e al bastone, tentano scacciare dal vicino convento di Chilandari sul Monte Athos, i confratelli serbi. (Disegno di A. Minardi).

Fig. 44. Fight between Bulgarian and Serbian monks, *La Tribuna Illustrata,* 1916. (Author's collection)

To World War I Allied officers, Mount Athos appeared as a miniaturized *macédoine* and potential arena for struggle. Harry Charles Luke was one of these officers. In 1915, during the Dardanelles campaign, he was sent to Athos on an armed boarding vessel to investigate persistent reports of the fuelling of German submarines; one monastery with a convenient coastline was especially under suspicion. But, the Englishman noticed, "many of the highly conflicting stories and rumors of which (if nothing else) Athos was then a fecund breeder reflected the racial antipathies that divided the monks into bitterly hostile camps." These racial antipathies were more complex than the nineteenth-century binary opposition between Russians and Greeks discussed in chapter 3. They were fuelled by external tensions between competing nationalist groups. Shifts in the balance of Balkan geopolitics regularly resonated throughout the closed space of the Athonite peninsula.[15]

For Luke, Athos, the only theocracy in Europe with the exception of the Vatican, was a unique political organism, but it was not the immutable fossil traditionally alive in the European popular geographical imagination. Because of its ethnically composite population and its naturally closed geography, the peninsula could be used as a sort of geopolitical observatory, reflecting, sometimes even anticipating the delicate power dynamics of the outer macrocosm. "The secular hatred between Serb and Bulgar, seven weeks later to erupt once more with the entry of Bulgaria into the war on the side of the Central Powers, was already smouldering between the supreme lovely Serbian monastery of Chilendar—epitome of Slavonic mediaevalism at its best—and the Bulgarian Zographou, in both of which we conducted very profitable investigations. Zographou for the same reason was at enmity with the great Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon, commonly known as Rossikon, where our researches proved more fruitful."[16]

Amplified by dramatic and at the same time grotesque visual renderings in the international press, these events circulated a new geopolitical Athos in the European imagination. For example, the first page of the February 13–20, 1916 issue of the Italian weekly newspaper *La Tribuna Illustrata* portrayed, "reflections of war on peaceful recesses: the Bulgarian monks of the monastery of Zograf, using every means possible—from the broom to fire, from the shovel to the ice-axe and the stick, try to chase their Serbian brethren away from the nearby convent of Hilandar on Mount Athos" (fig. 44).

For Luke, Athos's significance lay not only in its extraordinary role in stimulating the imagination about the Balkans and contributing "to the

picturesqueness of the world." In the Levant, the British officer explained, "where the creed is so largely synonymous with nationality, the Church is the backbone of national existence and propaganda, and the monastery is very largely the backbone of the Church." For the British officer, this was the key to understanding the ethnic tensions that had been shattering the peninsula for the previous two generations. Luke envisaged each ethnic community as a unique microcosm within Athos's microcosm. It was in Hilandar, for example, "that the epitome of Serbian history [was] to be found, not at Belgrade, nor at Uskub or Zagreb." The Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon, Luke observed, was "the very embodiment of Russian enterprise and propaganda. It was able to send three-hundred of its monks [recalled by the mother country] to take part in the Russo-Japanese war, and many more took part in the Great War [under the Russian flag]." Athos's five thousand Russians outnumbered the Greeks and threatened their *Lebensraum*. This Luke identified as the cause of a two-generation-long underground struggle; a struggle "between the new and the old, the intruder and the occupant, the progressive and the conservative . . . the vigorous and the feeble, the efficient and the effete, for the hegemony of Mount Athos."[17]

In 1916, Luke was sent again on mission to Athos, this time to provide logistical support to "our friends of Rossikon, cut off for the time being from Holy Russia and their normal supply-lines." But the great monastery and its dependencies, which, according to Luke, were suspected of hosting many distinguished naval and military men in disguise among their seven thousand monks, were about to see the end of their grandeur. After the 1917 October Revolution, the Russian golden river dried up: neither money, nor monks, nor pilgrims were sent to Athos. The Greeks had no longer to fear the Russians: the subterranean struggle for *Lebensraum* on Athos had come to an end. In 1919, the French troops, who had occupied the peninsula for nearly two years and claimed to have sequestered five hundred Austrian guns, also left the peninsula. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne officially recognized Greek sovereignty on Athos, and in 1924, an Athonite Charter codifying regulations and administrative dispositions was issued as a joint effort by the Holy Community and the Greek state. The Holy Mountain silently exited from the international geopolitical scene, but it continued to stir the Western imagination.[18]

For many, Athos remained an odd island-fossil. In the 1930s, the Holy Mountain became a favorite destination for travelers looking for something

to offset the impinging vulgarities of mass tourism in the Mediterranean. As transportation further improved and Athos was getting logistically closer to Europe and the United States, popular literature paradoxically boosted the Holy Mountain's exoticism through the lens of these travelers in search of the unconventional. In 1933, an article in *Vanity Fair* asserted that "on Mount Athos everything is male, the stones, the trees, the insects," and that it is the only place in the world where the author "never heard any mention of the depression. The centuries slip by unnoticed, and our torments are meaningless, once we have passed through the postern gate of these monasteries fortified against the Evil One."[19]

Some years later, Richard Halliburton, an eccentric American journalist and travel expert who had astonished the world with his elephant ride over the Alps in the tracks of Hannibal, paid a visit to the Holy Mountain. For him Athos was "a little country washed by the Aegean Sea, so fantastically different from all other countries in the world"; "a medieval world in the midst of progress and evolution"; a world "frozen but still living, where we can return to wonder at the past"; a curious world in which "all the inhabitants wear long beards" and "in all this time it has never introduced a single new idea in politics, education or science."[20]

Halliburton's visit to Athos was part of a broader project. The journalist had been commissioned to write a travel book and was financed to "move fast, visit strange places, [and] try to meet whomever [he] thought interesting and important." In the space of a few months, he roved from Cuba, in search of the origins of the Spanish-American War, to Ekaterinburg in Siberia, where he interviewed one of the Romanovs' chief assassins; from Georgia, with its oldest inhabitant (153 years old), to the site of Herod's palace, where Salome received the head of St. John the Baptist; and again, from romantic Abyssinia to the labyrinth of Crete and then to Mecca, where he attempted a pilgrimage. Halliburton's unique experience incarnated the modern dream: to dominate the "closed globe" and to conquer time and distance through technological progress, all in the search for a modern cabinet of curiosities. In the introduction, he wrote: "I suddenly had come to command to go and see [all the places I read about], to possess myself of a pair of seven league boots and stride across the map, from nation to nation, from continent to continent, straightaway to these beckoning goals, to these islands of desire."[21]

For the travelers of centuries past, Athos represented a mythical (or erudite)

landmark; for Orthodox pilgrims, Athos served as a sacred one. For Halliburton, the Holy Mountain was instead simply a curious "island of desire," an odd landmark within a shrunken world, within a map of bizarre places. In a completely explored globe, Halliburton and his contemporaries sought the lost romance of geographical discovery in improbable fragments, but also through temporal othering, through the localization of past temporal dimensions in defined geographical spots. Imprisoned by the snow in the "flying fortress" of Simonopetra, Halliburton could "look back through the ages and [behold] a glimpse of old Byzantium. The monks themselves were tenth century, their garments, their beards and faces, their faith, and most of all their unskeptical and childlike minds."[22]

In the 1930s, Athos was a compelling destination because one could materialize the modern dream within its bounded space, without the need for seven-league boots. One could feel as if he were walking on a political map, disrupting the distances of the outside closed globe by simply moving from one monastery to the next. For Ralph Brewster, a young German American from Florence traveling to Athos in the company of a depraved twenty-one-year-old ex-actor from Athens, space and time mysteriously converged on the Holy Mountain. Within a few miles, the two youngsters crossed different countries and eras. The Bulgarian Monastery of Zografou was an unfriendly foreign land. St. Panteleimon was "no longer Greece. . . . Our short journey seemed to have transported us hundreds of miles to some foreign country." While by the 1930s, Russian wealth was just a memory and Russian monks were now "the poorest on Athos," during a vigil, Brewster observed, "the power of the Empire of all the Russias seemed to be expressed in this torrent of barbaric sound." Vatopedi, "the Paris of Athos" with its modern innovations, seemed to have little in common with the Great Lavra, or "how a town looked in the Middle Ages," Brewster observed.[23]

In the 1930s, Athos was a fragment of Byzantium well connected to the global network: woodcarvings produced by some hermits in their remote cells were "sold for a good price to America," while from their inaccessible nests, other hermits gazed almost prophetically at the heartland of the Mackinderian closed globe. Brewster wrote: "[Father Ierásimos] told us more about the prophecies concerning Germany, and said that there was to be a war in the immediate future. It would not last long, but would be the most terrible war that has ever been fought, and would destroy the greater part of Europe. But it would be the last war in the world's history: peace would follow."[24]

Athos as the Cradle of the Western Subconscious

As blank spots were disappearing from early-twentieth-century world maps and the Great Powers were struggling for *Lebensraum,* another terra incognita suddenly opened up to exploration. While widely rejected by the scientific establishment, the theories of Freud, Jung, and other pioneering voyagers of the unconscious rapidly captured the popular imagination. Informed by the common language of evolutionary biology, early-twentieth-century psychoanalysis, history, geography, and anthropology converged in a common quest for the origins of mankind. In 1890, James Frazer anticipated Jung's theories of mythic archetypes imprinted in the deepest psychic structures of a human being, and by the early 1920s, Frazer constructed an "evolutionary history of mankind." The challenge of anthropological fieldwork, he argued, lay "in discovering splendid anomalies that, at the end of the disenchanted nineteenth century had miraculously preserved . . . the living human reality of archaic cult."[25] "Splendid anomalies" were to be found among the aborigines of Australia and other remote living fragments of mankind's ancestral past; these uncivilized peoples represented the "childhood of humanity."[26]

Freud, who had been originally trained as a biologist and neurologist, also equated archaic man with the contemporary "primitive" and the child. Post-Darwinian biological evolutionary approaches to history, psychology, anthropology, and other related disciplines produced an increasing interest in the phenomenon of survival. By the 1920s, survivals and recapitulation theories had escaped the boundaries of the academy to become science fiction. Several attempts were made "to write novels on a vast scale which link prehistory and history to provide a 'whole' account of the 'spirit of Man'."[27]

Mount Athos, an unusual place increasingly circulating in the post–World War I Western imagination through the international press, became the setting for one of the most popular examples of this genre: George Sylvester Viereck and Paul Eldridge's *My First Two Thousand Years: The Autobiography of the Wandering Jew* (1929). Conceived of as far back as 1914, the novel was to be essentially "a psychoanalytic interpretation of Man; it would chronicle the significant and recurrent experiences of Eternal Man through the course of human history, revealing his attempts to surmount mortality." The plot consisted of a modern reelaboration of the ancient legend of the wandering Jew, a contemporary of Christ cursed with immortality for taunting Jesus.[28]

The story is set at the outbreak of World War I. Two of its protagonists,

Basil Bassermann, a professor of psychoanalysis at Harvard, and his companion, Aubrey Lowell, found themselves stuck on Mount Athos waiting for their visas. In one of the monasteries, they got acquainted with Father Ambrose, "a remarkable psychologist . . . [who] has studied the library of Mount Athos, the oldest in the world, and is acquainted with the history of mental science from Aristotle to Freud," a mystic able to shed light on "the dark alleys in those gray convulsions [of the brain] that shut themselves stubbornly to facts." The three decided to practice psychoanalysis on the novel's hero, Isaac Lacquedem, a mysterious traveler of uncertain age and origin who "had also sought refuge in the monastery from the uncertainties of the World War." As Lacquedem unfolded his millenary story, he turned out to be the legendary wandering Jew.[29]

A German American poet and journalist, and later one of the major pro-German propagandists in the country, Viereck was a devotee of Freudian psychology. In 1923, he was the first journalist to interview Freud "for the purpose of explaining psychoanalysis to the public." Early-twentieth-century scientists dismissed psychoanalysis as a break with science and a return to metaphysics, mysticism, or superstition. But it was exactly these elements that stirred the fantasy of the general public. Viereck and Eldridge's choice to open their novel with the dramatic Athos setting responded to this taste, to the attempt at reconciling "the miraculous [with] science . . . the revealed [with] the unrevealed mysteries."[30]

While internal ethnic controversies contributed to spread Athos's fame in the Western imagination through the popular press, French psychologists interested in hypnosis were already familiar with the monks of the Holy Mountain. In his *Magnétisme et hypnotisme,* for example, Alexandre Cullerre, a member of the Société Médico-Psychologique, compared the monks' contemplative practices to those of the Indian fakirs. It is perhaps through these practices that Viereck and Eldridge derived their knowledge of Mount Athos, a place they had never visited. A topos in their geographical imagination, Athos was narrated by the two authors as an ancestral locus of mystery, as a crossroads of obscure forces and supernatural phenomena.[31]

The mountain was also exploited as a powerful geological metaphor for the human brain and mankind's history. Like these, according to the two authors, Athos concealed the most recondite mysteries enfolded in its strata: "While we are chatting aimlessly, the belligerents are upsetting the map of Europe. The peak on which we are standing has seen many revolutions of the wheel of fate. If only, Aubrey remarked dreamingly, the rock could speak, what marvelous

tales it could unfold! Intimate stones would be more eloquent than the camera, if we only knew the secret that loosens their tongues. . . . Man could tell more than the stone if he were able to release the race memory that survives in the primordial cell."[32]

On Mount Athos, "a spot where for twelve centuries men's minds have dwelt upon the eternal everything seems to glow with hidden significance. Here all things are possible." Athos's mystic landscape became a material projection of the hero's complex psyche. Its physical geography was used to materialize the metaphysical. The protagonists of *My First Two Thousand Years* investigated Athos's different strata of revealed and unrevealed memory. Each layer concealed a mystery, and each mystery reflected the geopolitical and psychological anxieties of the authors and their era:[33]

> The sun hurled spears of fire at the golden cross crowning the marble peak of Mount Athos. Suddenly the flaming glory was darkened by shadows of seven black-breasted plovers hovering for a moment, as if in deliberation, over the ivy-crowned tower of the monastery, and vanishing with a shill cry. "What an unearthly sound!" exclaimed Aubrey Lowell. "Their screams," remarked his companion . . . "echo the sounds of the battle-fields over which they have flown." "It is incomprehensible to me by what channels the Holy Fathers keep in touch with the outside world, in times as these," Aubrey remarked. "Not many months ago," professor Bassermann replied, dropping his voice to a whisper, "a mutiny against the Government broke out on a Russian warship. Eluding the Grand Fleet, at least thirty of the officers and the men landed, no one knows where. A little later thirty newcomers, holy hermits, no doubt, sought refuge in one of the monasteries."[34]

While the Athos of the early-twentieth-century popular imagination was a mysterious locus of geopolitical intrigues, in Aubrey's fantasy, such intrigues were more profound. For him, below "geopolitical Athos" and "Christian-Byzantine Athos" lay a "mythical-pagan Athos." "At night, when none can spy them," Viereck and Eldridge wrote, "[pagan gods disguised as monks] throw the monk's gown from their lovely bodies and celebrate again the Eleusinian mysteries." For Aubrey, Athos was also the "remarkable promontory [from where] all religions and superstitions merge," and an extraordinary physical and mental observatory. From the height of their pseudoscientific knowledge, and from an improbable panoramic location, the gaze of the three explorers

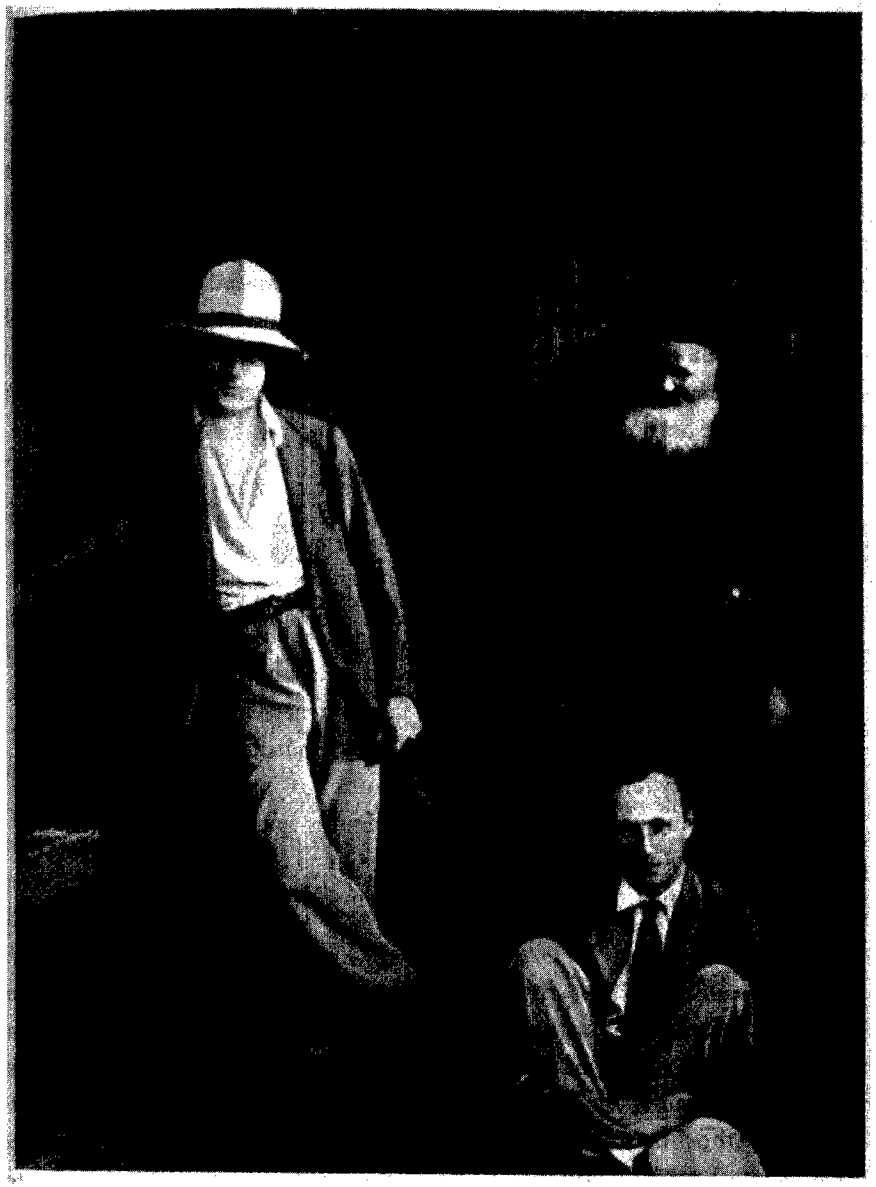


Fig. 45. David Talbot Rice and Mark Ogilvie-Grant with Docheiariou's guest master, in R. Byron, *The Station Athos: Treasures and Men* (London: John Lehmann, 1928).

of the unconscious embraced the plain of Troy, Mount Olympus, the vestiges of Xerxes' Canal, and, not least, the summit of Athos, "the mountain where Christ was tempted."[35]

My First Two Thousand Years met with great success. It soon became a science-fiction classic, and was translated into German and reprinted more than ten times. By exploiting an image of Athos derived from the popular press and reelaborating this image as a metaphor, the novel conveyed the Holy Mountain to the public as a place of mystery and intrigue, but more significantly as a fossil and a cradle of the Western subconscious.

Athos as the Cradle of Western Art

In the 1920s, the conceptualization of Mount Athos as an ancestral fossil was not confined to science fiction, nor was the quest for origins the exclusive domain of anthropology and other related sciences. While geographers like Taylor Smith and Ellsworth Huntington were busy mapping the cradle of civilization and measuring skulls in Central Asia, professional and amateur art historians identified Athos as the cradle of Western art. In 1926, a party of four Oxford-educated young men traveled to the Holy Mountain in pursuit of Byzantium's last living vestiges. Their experience and findings were captured by Robert Byron, then a twenty-one-year-old modern history student, in *The Station Athos: Treasures and Men* (1928). Among his three companions was David Talbot Rice, who would become a distinguished Byzantinist and art history professor and, later in life, Edinburgh University's vice principal (fig. 45).[36]

On Athos, Byron and Talbot Rice took pictures of the frescoes in the various monasteries and began to conceive their own evolutionary theory of Western painting, which was later illustrated in *The Birth of Western Painting* (1930). According to Byron and Talbot Rice, Western painting originated directly from Byzantium, of which Athos represented the last living fragment, and therefore the starting point of their intellectual adventure. Their book (re)constructed the history of Western painting as a geological evolution from Byzantine icons to El Greco and Picasso.[37]

For Talbot Rice and Byron, modern Western painting evolved from Byzantine art as naturally as geomorphic forms evolve. In the early decades of the twentieth century, human progress and geological evolution were both defined through the language of the natural sciences. Through a complex interplay of metaphors, racial and ecological theories collapsed the distinctions between

human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, the hard sciences and the humanities. Chamberlain, one of geology's pioneers, explained the evolution of geomorphic forms in anthropomorphic terms, as a moral progress toward "the good," toward perfection. Conversely, in 1936, Griffith Taylor formulated a "strata theory," urging that a series of migrations from a central core located somewhere in Central Asia provided "the key to unlocking race history"; hence his geological metaphor evoking the idea of racial groups being diffused through earlier cultures.[38]

In the same way that a geologist might study rocky strata and fossils to investigate prehistorical eras, or a team of geographers and anthropologists might penetrate the distant plains of Central Asia in pursuit of the "cephalic index" closest to that of the "original stock," Talbot Rice and Byron searched for "artistic fossils" on Mount Athos—itself a fossilized "fragment of a life which once held sway over all [the] Greek seaboard [and which] endures unaltered since its foundation." For the two Englishmen, Athos was an example of survival; it was one of those rare "throwbacks, glimpses of the systems of the past fossilized by accidents of the environment, marvels of eccentricities," as defined by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell. As Talbot Rice wrote in a 1928 journal article, Athos was "the only example of the life of the Middle Ages which exists in Europe . . . the only spot in these days of hooting motor cars, roaring machinery and rushing, busy people, in which it is possible to lead a completely altered life."[39]

For Talbot Rice, himself trained in anthropology and archaeology, on the Holy Mountain "one sees from actual experience what life [in the Middle Ages] really was, and one continues to live until the discomforts of the thirteenth century finally persuade one that the evils of this age are amply repaid by its merits and that the romance of the Middle Ages is even excelled by the adventurous spirit of today. The medieval life is something that one likes to remember as a curiosity, something to be experienced occasionally only. But the claims of its art are more lasting and in these days of ease and luxury we can appreciate them more fully."[40]

The romance of fieldwork on Athos derived from its contrast with modern life and its comforts. The virtues of the modern traveler were no longer bravery, heroism, and physical strength, as in the past century, but rather, patience and an ability to adapt. For Talbot Rice, not only was fieldwork on Athos necessary as a rhetorical device that provided the scholar with ethnographic authority; it was also necessary to give him a sense of how Byzantine life was, and thus

enable him to understand its art through direct experience. It was through direct field observation that the art historian studied Athos, just like a biologist would study an organism.

A *living* fragment of the past, Mount Athos blurred temporal boundaries, and also disciplinary ones, turning the art historian into an anthropologist, and the traveler into a well-informed Byzantine historian. Fieldwork, or direct contact with the material object rather than textbooks, was an aspect considered central by Talbot Rice as a professor, but especially by the nonacademic Robert Byron, perpetually at war against "the paper Philhellenes." *The Station,* as well as most of Byron's popular works, was indeed what Talbot Rice defined as an "art-travel book . . . namely the gay, but well informed travel book . . . concerned with buildings, paintings and works of art."[41]

Of course, Talbot Rice and Byron were not the only early-twentieth-century scholars who physically experienced Mount Athos as the last living fragment of Byzantium. Richard Dawkins, director—with Hasluck—of the British School at Athens and the first holder of the Bywater and Sotheby Professorship of Byzantine and Modern Greek Language and Literature at Oxford, from 1920 to 1939, made no fewer than four trips to the Holy Mountain. These resulted in *The Monks of Athos* (1936), the first book on Athonite legends.[42]

Like Frazer, Dawkins nurtured a keen interest in the "irrational" side of the past. Unlike cynical nineteenth-century travelers to Athos, Dawkins considered legends, folktales, and songs, which he collected in various parts of Greece, as a kind of knowledge about the past "different from the knowledge contained in historical documents, but equally valid and valuable." According to the British scholar, Athos "provides an atmosphere in which religious legends spring up easily and spread with marvelous fertility." Such an atmosphere "naturally" produced one of the richest corpi of traditional stories in the contemporary world. Athos thus represented a unique source for the exploration of what Dawkins called "folk-memory," a sort of ancestral substratum comparable to the Freudian subconscious.[43]

As the protagonist of a new era, Dawkins was fascinated by modern technology and the new spatial perceptions this generated. In the second chapter of his book, he provided the first description of Athos from an airman's view. He hardly concealed his excitement while viewing "the peninsula as a whole" during his Athens-Thessalonica flight in 1933. The Chalkidikē, he wrote, "stretched out in the sea, so much like a map," and the outline of the peninsula "was so beautiful—I had only once before been in an aeroplane—that I immediately

made a sketch of it." While technology allowed a full and unprecedented appreciation of Athos, the peninsula remained for Dawkins a fossil, "the survival of the medieval Byzantine world-view," of an exotic country to which he would flee from the modern world.[44] Byzantine civilization, of which Athos was just a synecdoche, remained a world completely disconnected from modernity. By contrast, Robert Byron, an eccentric young man more interested in politics than in the academy, saw no disconnection between these two worlds.

If, for Byron, Mount Athos was a fixed point in a modern, changing world, "the station where all years have stopped," the civilization it stood for contained, Byron believed, an extraordinary, almost revolutionary, potential. In the first chapter of his *Byzantine Achievement,* he argued:

> In the whole of European history, no moment offers more relevant comparison to our own than that in which Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity marked Byzantine civilization with the same vital impulse as technology does in our modern era. The ponderous complacence of classicism, the stationed symmetry, the reasoned representation . . . there rises in the two parallel ages a quest of movement and emotional expression, which bursts the confinement of capital and cornice, and spurns the suave contours of rotund boys and bolstered urns. This vigour derives in one case from Christianity, in the other from science, each the new force of its time, carrying Reason to the service of the irrational.[45]

Byron's subversive pen and youthful enthusiasm managed to turn Byzantine civilization, traditionally ignored if not despised by nineteenth-century scholars, into the most significant and vibrant stage in the history of Western civilization. From the gloomy bulwark of medieval backwardness and superstitious conservatism, in Byron's account Mount Athos was transformed into the last remains of this "golden age" of the "joyous life." It was on the Holy Mountain that "a truer picture of everyday life in the Byzantine world could be culled from careful observations . . . than from a narrow study of the hagiographical texts." Even bricks and stones on Athos breathed with life, with the same dynamism which one could breathe in contemporary Europe:[46]

> It is far a cry from the squat bulk of St. Sophia to the windows of a modern block of offices. Yet the breath of both carries the eye away to a suggestion of something beyond the material substances of brick and stone and the fashioning of human hands. . . . Inside and out, in all the buildings of the [Byzantine] Empire, from the great domed mass of St Sophia to the fortified monasteries of Athos, the hint of perpendicular activity persists . . . The cardinal importance of the subordination of all external ornament to the passage of the eye is exemplified, for contemporaries, in the town hall of Stockholm or, on a lesser scale, in the Cenotaph in Whitehall.[47]

Talbot Rice defined Byron's *Byzantine Achievement* as "virtually the manifesto of a crusade . . . against the narrow classicism of the schoolmasters, against the conservatism of the old-fashioned historian" who, "amid the mysterious glory of St Sophia, or the pungent energy of modern industrial creation, [ached] for the neat refinements of the Parthenon."[48]

Byron's project was political, rather than merely intellectual. It was a crusade he undertook on different fronts: as an innovative anticlassicist art historian; as a committed liberal fighting against Victorian conservatism and British imperialism; and eventually as a devoted anti-German propagandist. The spiritual link he managed to establish between Byzantium and modernity provided him with a powerful set of images and metaphors to campaign for his position. In the wonders of modern technology as much as in the marvels of Byzantium, Byron envisioned a progressive force, which he forcefully opposed to conservative classicism. A true son of his time, Byron looked at internationalism as the ultimate moral achievement of modernity. He wrote: "In the external relations of its political units the chief hope of the modern world lies in the elimination of the armed and insular state, and the aggressive racial consciousness of its inhabitants. . . . Far from creating an international spirit, the British Empire has done no more than propagate an evil nationalism." Byron's vision of a multiethnic Byzantine Empire embodied the historical realization of his modern ideal.[49]

If Christianity was the revolutionary force holding together the Byzantine Empire, the "air age" was to become the hallmark of an international cooperation blurring ethnic and political boundaries. Byron opposed the "freedom of the skies" to the Mackinderian "freedom of the seas," which, he believed, had been "a principle of British policy, a pretext of British wars, since the days of Elizabeth."[50]

"Drawn to frontiers, places where the order of things is polyglot and heterogeneous, places where cultures interact," Byron could see the historical realization of his cosmopolitan dream on Mount Athos, itself a multiethnic Byzantine microcosm.[51] Like Brewster, Byron wandered with his party from Great Lavra

and its Babel of architectural motives—Turkish, Byzantine, and Iranian—to Saint Panteleimon and its "flat-nosed Mongols and giant blonds . . . *'shck'* and *'kck'* issuing from their lips in place of the familiar liquids . . . characters of Chekhov, Turgeniev, Dostoievsky!"[52]

Byron's alternative evolutionary theory of Western art and civilization was, in a way, an attempt to globalize history itself, denying that the West alone ever gave life to a genuine culture. The intention of *The Byzantine Achievement* was "to gather the currents of the past in a single stream; and while indicating, with deference, a number of unexplored eddies in the spate of Western evolution, to enable a successor, if ever it is written, to show which forces have retained their vitality in the present time." To illustrate this complex process, Byron once again made use of biological metaphors. Civilization was for Byron a "product of the eternal distillation and fusion of human experiment" and "real knowledge must come from a study not of this or that particular cell, but of the relationship between them all . . . [of] organic harmony." Freedom from narrow prejudice, he maintained, depended on "atmospheric environment" as much as on "liberal education."[53]

During the years preceding World War II, Byron's commitment to the modern liberal ideal turned into a fierce hatred for the Germans and every form of fascism. In a 1938 article for the *New Statesman and Nation*, a leftist journal to which by that time he had become a regular contributor, Byron published "an indictment of the intellectual lassitude of Britain toward its inevitable foe." He also started volunteer propaganda for the BBC, setting aside his intellectual interests to awaken Britain and Europe to the imminent peril. Byron's insistence on activism—political and intellectual—rather than librarian scholarship took him, in the 1930s, from Byzantium and Athos to Russia, Central Asia, and India in pursuit of a cradle of civilization shifting more and more eastward on the wave of Aryan theories. In 1941, this same zeal led him to embark as a journalist on a destroyer, bound to Meshed, Iran. The destroyer was torpedoed off the north coast of Scotland on the February 24, leaving no survivors.[54]

Athos during the Second World War

The Viennese Legacy

Robert Byron's conception of an evolutionary and global (art) history and his interest in the cradle of civilization was ironically paralleled by the work of a

man coming from a diametrically opposed sociopolitical standpoint: the German art historian Josef Strzygowski, second chair and among the major representatives of the New Vienna school. The school, which had been established between the late 1920s and early 1930s, aimed at upgrading art history into a general science of culture, into a new *Kulturwissenschaft*, a synthetic discipline that mediated among the history of religion, anthropology, folkloric studies, intellectual history, social history, and the history of political institutions.

For Strzygowski and his successors, art objects and images possessed a self-explanatory power as material relics. Unlike other historical documents, the art historian's objects promised unmediated sensory access into the foundations of culture. They were "barometers of cultural evolution and fossilized records of daily life." As combined with evolutionary and climatic theories, the directness of artifacts and figurative representations offered one a unique instrument with which to naturalize political discourses.[55]

Art history provided Strzygowski with material evidence for the currently fashionable Aryan theories. The art historian argued that his discipline "must concentrate upon the work of art and its values, *absolute and evolutional.*" The evolution of Aryan civilization, he argued, started from a "cradle," which he geographically located in Iran and India.[56]

Byron had speculated that "from that uncharted fount, the home of the Aryans, the magic Hellenes brought their powers of reasoning, their perception of form, and their language." Strzygowski, Byron's Austrian counterpart, defined Iran as "the Hellas of Asia." It was in a region in northern Iran, at the same latitude as Germany and morphologically similar to it, that the "home of the Aryans" was located. Whether from this remote mountain region or from the Schwarzwald, Aryan art was characterized by a vigorous "natural" decorative style, as opposed to the "human" pictorial style of the "decadent" (Semitic) classical South.[57]

The division between a diseased South and a healthy North was a commonplace in the German geographical imagination. Such a distinction acquired scientific legitimacy thanks to the work of the members of the Ahnenerbe, an SS-supported academic institution that promoted research into Germanic antiquity and racial identity. German scholars insistently opposed the natural simplicity of the sylvan ancient Germany described by Tacitus to the corrupted urban environment of Rome and the Mediterranean. Enlightenment universalism, whose language and inspirational models were to be found in the classics, was soon wiped out by the Germans' increasing interest in native

Germanism, with its Gothic irregularities and woodland wanderings. After 1933, forest themes irrupted into every sphere of art and politics.[58]

As the Germanic verdant forest was supplanting classical marbles, Strzygowski and his German-speaking colleagues enthusiastically investigated Eastern influences on Medieval North Alpine art, accusing the "ossified humanist, obstinately clinging to his Mediterranean creed" of being "the avowed enemy of the German *Volk,* for [the *Volk*] has the right to its northern standpoint in scholarship, just as the Latin races have [the right] to the Mediterranean creed."[59]

In Strzygowski's evolutionary narrative, Byzantium served as an intermediate link between two opposite worlds—Rome and the Orient—but especially between what he called "original Aryan stock" and "the West." Strzygowski visited Athos in his youth, during his first two-year-long research trip through the great sites of Byzantine art (1888–90). Between the two wars, the Byzantine link, of which Athos was the most tangible manifestation, provided Strzygowski with a channel through which he could emancipate Western art history from traditional classicism.[60]

Byron, the committed anti-German, traveled to Athos and then to Central Asia in pursuit of the origins of a past greatness through which he sought to deconstruct the dying British Empire. The magnificence of his Byzantine Empire and Aryan culture were to be measured against the present disillusionment. Strzygowski also traveled to Athos and Central Asia. He exploited the same narrative, the same arguments, the same theories, the same geography, and the same antipathy toward the classics as Byron, but to the opposite end: to support nationalistic discourse with a mythical past; with a counternarrative which was to "lift scholars over the pale of the usual classical education and *teach them without prejudice to patriotism . . . the true position of their country in the world.*"[61]

Strzygowski's work fulfilled the call of the geographer Ewald Banse "to give the body politic iron defenses, based on the land, on blood and culture." The German strategist opposed "the healthy egotism of national sentiment" to internationalism, "a throwing-up of the sponge, a degeneration of the tissue." The internationalist, Banse argued, "is a bastard in blood and a eunuch in intellect. Man's greatest works always spring from the national soil." Byron looked to Byzantine grandeur in order to attack nation-states and nationalisms; Strzygowski did the same in order to naturalize and exalt his own nationalistic discourse. During World War II, Byzantium became a serious affair in Germany.

As noted by David Olster, "few schools of Byzantine history have produced scholarship at once so technically proficient and so ideologically driven as German scholarship from the mid-1930's to the end of the Second World War."[62]

Athos and the Dölger Expedition

On July 2, 1941, at 6:00 a.m., two petrol-motored sailboats left the port of Thessalonica. The afternoon of the following day they reached Daphnē and disembarked for one of the most remarkable expeditions which ever took place on the Holy Mountain. No more than three months had passed since Hitler's invasion of Greece. Previously, on April 27, German troops had marched up to the Acropolis and hoisted the swastika, appropriating "the symbol of human culture," as Hitler called the Parthenon. Germany's occupation of Greece took place after Mussolini's shameful defeat on October 28 of the previous year. Though initially unwilling to bring the Balkans into the war, the Germans feared that the Italians' setbacks might present Britain the chance to establish itself in Greece, an undesirable prospect in light of the planned action against Russia in the coming spring. Forced to secure his Balkan flank, Hitler marched into Greece through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria with overwhelming force.[63]

Unlike their comrades elsewhere, Athos's German invaders did not disembark tankers and jeeps, nor were they armed with submachine guns or hand grenades. Most of them had been trained not in German military camps, but in the classrooms of the most prestigious universities of the Reich. Their arms consisted in notebooks, pens, and cameras, with which they aimed to capture manuscripts, frescoes, icons, and other Byzantine treasures on the Holy Mountain. The expedition, which had been sent out by the Sonderkommando Griechenland's Operative Unit of the Reichsleiter for the Occupied Territories Rosenberg and had been generously supported by the German Wehrmacht, included highly qualified academics and technicians. Franz Dölger, the expedition's leader, was a professor of Byzantine studies at the University of Munich and one of the greatest Byzantinists of all time.[64]

Dölger's was not the first Rosenberg Sonderkommando dispatched to southern Europe. Instructed by Hitler to seize "all scientific and archival materials of the ideological foe," Alfred Rosenberg, the regime's chief ideologue, had started dispatching Sonderkommandos to the Balkans as early as April 23, 1941. Local military commanders issued orders to their troops to assist the Sonderkommandos. Thessalonica, which hosted one of the most numerous and ancient

of the Jewish communities of Europe, and was the first Greek city to be occupied by the Wehrmacht, was obviously among the earliest targets for the scientific investigation of the Reich's enemies in the Balkans. The archival and artistic goods plundered in the city and throughout the occupied territories were to enrich the library of the Frankfurt Hoch-Schule, the institute founded by Rosenberg in 1939 for the exploration of the "Jewish Question." Between May and November 1941, a unit of more than thirty officers and German academics scoured occupied Greece. "Two years later the director of Rosenberg's New Library of the Jewish Question boasted proudly that among his 500,000 volumes was a collection of 10,000 books and manuscripts from Greece."[65]

While not directly related to the war against Bolshevism or Judaism, Dölger's scientific engagement in the grand Rosenberg plan was part of a preliminary maneuver to transfer Athos's treasures to the Reich. The scientific expedition was preceded by an intense diplomatic exchange between the German authorities and the Holy Community. In a letter dated June 29, 1941, the German military chief for the Thessalonica-Aegean area, Lieutenant-General Johannes Haarde, asked the community for maximum cooperation with the Dölger expedition: "Prof. Dölger, leader of the scientific operations, is not unknown to the Fathers of Mount Athos and his persona grants complete security for the appropriate and careful use of ancient materials. We therefore beg the holy Fathers to provide the mentioned persons with every facility, and especially to allow Mr. Dölger himself to work in the archives and the libraries of the monasteries, and [to allow] the technicians under his guidance free photographing, in fulfillment of the orders of the Highest Military Authorities of Germany."[66]

To the monks, Dölger's mission was probably no absolute novelty. During the brief World War I French occupation of Athos in 1919, Gabriel Millet, a prominent Byzantinist at the Collège de France, led an apparently similar expedition to Mount Athos, in cooperation with the French School of Classical Studies at Athens. With the aid of the Section Photographique de l'Armée d'Orient, Millet and his team managed to photograph monuments, frescoes, and archival materials. His work resulted in his famous book *Monuments de l'Athos* (1927) and several other publications. It also initiated the publication of the *Archives de l'Athos,* now running to twenty-two volumes.

Dölger's mission, however, was different, and Haarde's letter obscured its true goal. While apparently reiterating Professor Millet's expedition, in reality the German "scientific" mission was not undertaken on Dölger's initiative, but on Rosenberg's. Besides seeking to gather information about the Orthodox

Church, its relationship with the Vatican, and on the institution of Orthodox monasticism, the expedition was intended as a first step toward the plundering of Athos's treasures and their transfer to the Reich. The plan was to be fulfilled in autumn 1943, but the project fell through for reasons which have not yet been clarified.[67]

If Rosenberg's material appropriation of Athos's treasures failed, Dölger's scientific work did not. In its own way, such work contributed to the Reich's historical and geopolitical exaltation. For the German professor, Byzantium was not the link to Aryan culture described in Strzygowski's early works; it was not one of the civilizations in the art historian's puzzle. The sole object of his lifelong research, Byzantium was for Dölger overwhelming and unique. It was a cultural guide to the untutored West, protector and imperial master of the Slavs. Through a kind of bizarre metempsychosis, Dölger projected the Third Reich and the brief hegemony of the European New Order onto his version of the Byzantine Empire. Athos, the last living fragment of this glorious Byzantine world, was charged with a special symbolic potential. Beyond its scholarly scope, Dölger's expedition to the Holy Mountain was a symbolic conquest of one of the great landmarks in the history of civilization. The *Hakenkreuzfahne* (swastika flag) fluttering on the roof of Dionysiou Monastery produced in Dölger and his team the same excitement that the German troops felt while hoisting the swastika over the Acropolis (see figs. 46 and 47).[68]

Dölger was conscious of the visual power the superimposition of German symbols on Old Europe's historical landscapes exercised on the popular German geopolitical imagination. Besides his monumental scholarly publications, the German professor produced *Mönchsland Athos* (1943), a photographic book sponsored by the treasurer of the NSDAP, Reichsleiter Franz Xaver Schwarz. This would circulate Athos (and thus Byzantium and the Balkans) as a German-domesticated icon beyond the walls of the Reich's academies. In *Mönchsland Athos,* image came before word. Powered by wartime technology, photography became the primary means of visual expression in World War II culture. Monochrome photographs were transmitted across the continent by wire and across the oceans by radio waves, and published in magazines and newspapers. They brought the drama of the front into the homes of millions of European and American citizens. As a highly efficient means of cultural communication, photography represented credibility. It also allowed mass distribution, and the instant convertibility of pictures into symbols.[69]

For Dölger, photography was both documentary and scientific. At the end of

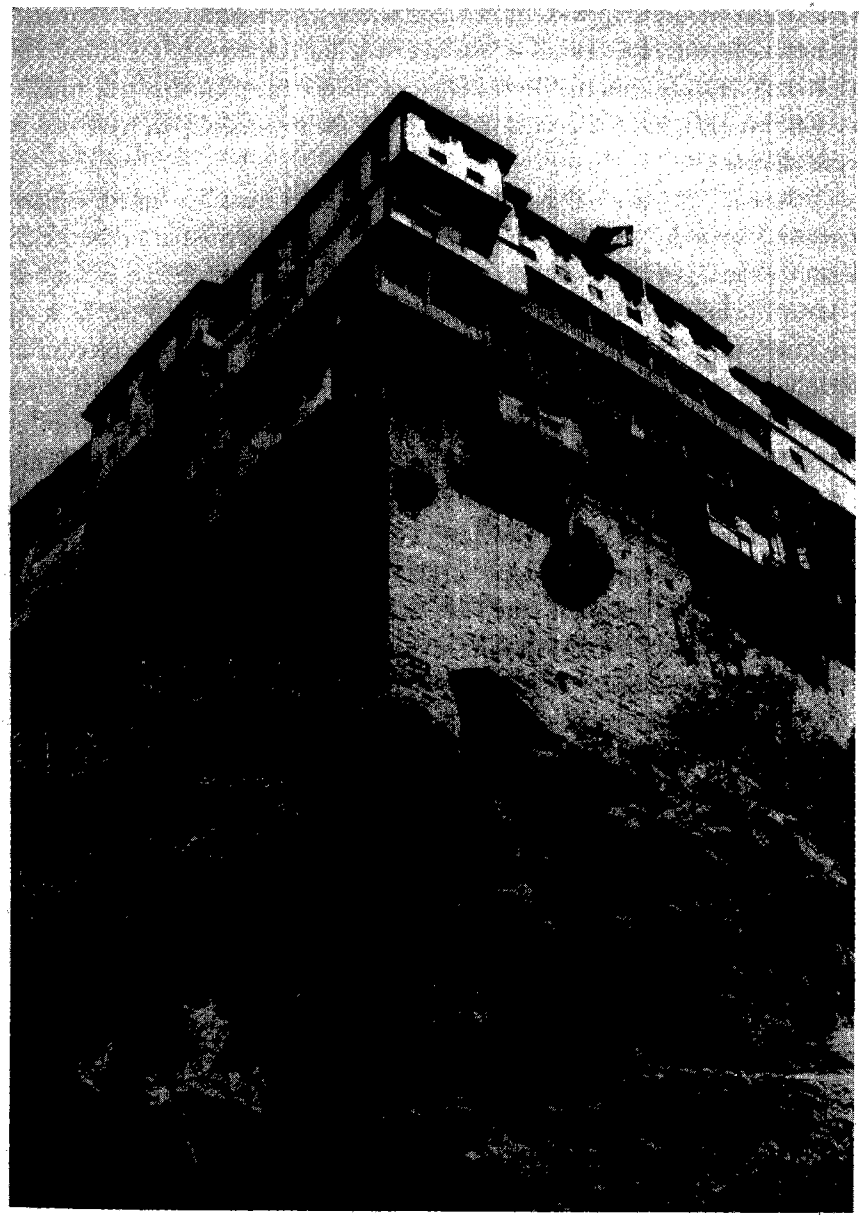


Fig. 46. The swastika on Dionysiou, in F. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos* (Munich: F. Bruckmann Verlag, 1943, p. 87).

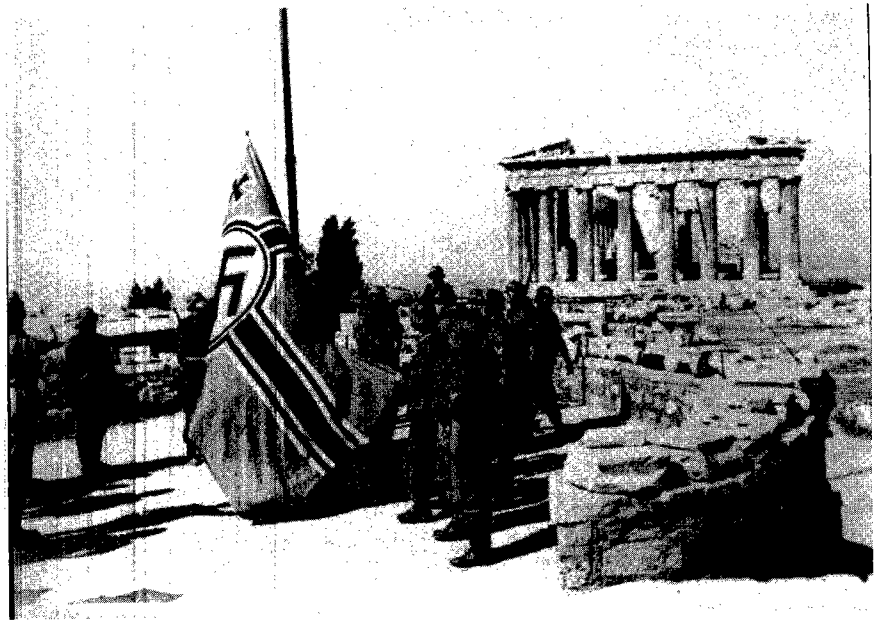


Fig. 47. The swastika on the Acropolis, May 1941. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-165-0419-19A, photograph: Bauer)

his Athos mission, the German scholar and his team boasted a total of around 1,800 photographs of buildings, frescoes, icons, art objects, and manuscripts, shot in seventeen of the twenty main monasteries, as well as in the Protaton—all accompanied by hundreds of scientific descriptions: a result comparable only to Sevastianov's earlier enterprise. Dölger's 1,800 photographs represented an invaluable scientific aid for the study and circulation of manuscripts and other materials. Documentary pictures of the expedition, on the other hand, provided a powerful political tool. Duly arranged and annotated in *Mönchsland Athos,* the photographs strengthened Dölger's words with the power of apparent objectivity. They transformed his descriptions of Athos and its inhabitants, and even his most daring ideological claims, into indisputable statements.

Photographic equipment and photography itself became an instrument for measuring Balkan backwardness against German "scientific" progress (as with the *National Geographic* and its American audience in the interwar period). In Karyés, Dölger wrote, there was also "the photographer who has set up his photographic equipment in the marketplace. As the photographic expert of

Fig. 48. Dölger (on left) at rest on a balcony in Karyés, in F. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos* (Munich: F. Bruckmann Verlag, 1943, p. 287).

Fig. 49. Dölger taking notes in Daphnē, in F. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos* (Munich: F. Bruckmann Verlag, 1943, p. 285).

our expedition figured out, this actually comes from the child days of the art of photography, but here it is certainly regarded as a kind of miracle."[70]

Photography allowed Dölger to objectify the monks and laymen of Athos, to isolate them as exotic curiosities. The bespectacled German professor, however, did not hide behind the camera. He took advantage of photographs as authoritative statements of his "scientific" physical presence on the peninsula, as well as an important source of ethnographic information. He was immortalized while examining the archives of the Holy Community, and again, in the company of other team members on a balcony in Karyés, sipping a glass of *tsípouro,* or Turkish coffee, served by a humble monk (fig. 48). The formal look and dress of the German scholars suggested an authoritative detachment from the milieu. They found themselves on Mount Athos, but their involvement with monastic life was purely intellectual. They were there on a "scientific expedition" to observe, record, and transfer knowledge to the Reich. At the same time, through their detached postures and "scientific" practices, the team established a silent supremacy over the subservient Athonite population.

Dölger was once again photographed in Daphnē, as he was sitting at a round table, taking notes, surrounded by the curious gazes of "picturesque" laymen and "atemporal" bearded monks (fig. 49). Rather than a Byzantine historian, here he resembled a diligent ethnographer recording the habits and the customs of some "primitive" people. The German scholar had become the center of attention for his objects of observation. Some of these looked amused, others skeptical, others just inquisitive. An invisible wall divided them from the scholar. It was a wall Dölger was creating less with his spectacles, elegant hat, and formal tie, than with his pen. Probably neither the laymen nor the monks would ever get to know what he was so zealously writing.

"The image of 'staring people,'" Dölger commented, "is a typical scene of Balkan peasant life. Rarely is something unusual on the street to be seen without being immediately surrounded from all sides by curious people who observe everything in the way of gaping children. For example, a European who sits at a table and is writing something is for the Athos people something extraordinary. One does not talk; one simply allows the *kombolói* to move through the fingers, one sits quietly and waits to see if something exciting happens, or to see if an opportunity presents itself to join the margins."[71]

The German scholar sat at the center of the scene, but at the same time he was removed from it. In a time of disenchanted pragmatism, the fact of being on the field invested the researcher (usually the ethnographer) with an

uncontestable authority, which, unlike other nineteenth-century scholars, he would hardly achieve through textual quotations. According to Clifford, the authority of the academic fieldworker-theorist was established in the years between 1920 and 1950. By the 1940s, the "myth of field work" had thus become well established.[72]

Dölger's fieldwork on Athos, however, was ethnographic also in the sense that it contributed to the shaping of a Balkan racial otherness within the German geopolitical imagination. From the German perspective, the childlike "staring" laymen and monks had little to share with the ancient Greek heroes. During the occupation of Greece, familiar stereotypes gradually overlaid the powerful philhellenism of German ideology. While superior to the Jews, the racial connection between ancient and modern Greeks was openly doubted. As Dölger's pictures and comments made explicit, the "staring people of Athos" were first of all "Balkans"—"primitives ignorant of civilized behavior." Dölger's direct field experience added empirical evidence to his complex "scientific" racial theories. As the Rosenberg Sonderkommandos were at work throughout the occupied Eastern Territories, German historians speculated about the malign effect of Semitic blood upon the classical Greek stock. Rejected by nineteenth-century Romantic philhellenes and King Otto's supporters, Fallmerayer's theory that racial continuity with the ancients had been interrupted by Slavic invasions from the sixth to the ninth century was revived by and gained increasing popularity in the Third Reich.[73]

Originally trained in the classics, Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790–1861) demonstrated on the basis of linguistic and bioracial criteria that "the Greek race has disappeared from Europe, for not a single drop of pure Greek blood flows in the veins of Greece's Christian population." A profound abyss separated modern Greeks from their ancestors. Even the 1821 Revolution was after all an Albanian and not a Greek question, as certain Romantic-era philhellenes, such as Lord Byron, believed. Today, Fallmerayer argued, one could speak of an *Albanian* Athens: "the new Eastern political entity could at its best be a 'Slav-Greek' country. . . . The new Athens, the new Sparta, the new Hellas *in fieri* could only get light from Kiev." Fallmerayer found direct confirmation of his theories on his trip to the Morea (1831–33). About ten years later, the German scholar and politician also traveled to Mount Athos, which he defined as "the forested cathedral of eastern Christianity." This verdant cathedral made Fallmerayer's thoughts wander back to "the paganism of young Germany . . . to the history of primitive Germans."[74]

Dölger edited and commented on Fallmerayer's report, which he defined as "the most beautiful of all Athos travel accounts." Although at times critical toward the sharpness of Fallmerayer's Manichean vision, Dölger admired Fallmerayer and his work. He felt his theory of the complete Slavization of the Greek folk element in the Balkans had to be somehow rehabilitated to its correct proportions, and Third Reich scholarship was working in that direction. For Dölger, Fallmerayer's fundamental contribution was "the faithful division of Europe into an active progressive West that includes Germanic and Roman people and, in its 'frozenness,' a passive East fallen into despotism, which has dominated in the 'Greek-Slav' world and Turkish hegemony." While critical of Fallmerayer's ahistorical narration, which emphasized the Slav element over the Greek, Dölger maintained that his German predecessor managed to capture "the most important and most decisive of the symptoms of Athos": its frozenness. Orthodox Christianity, he argued, was an arresting force. It prevented scientific progress and cultural change in the Balkan region. Athos was the center of Orthodoxy and thus the epitome of this frozenness. Since Fallmerayer's visit, Dölger concluded, "things have essentially remained the same: . . . a petrified Byzantium."[75]

For Dölger, Mount Athos was an extraordinary place. He defined it as "a quiet fairy-tale island of pious observance standing in the middle of the flowing and constantly changing streams of history"; a fairy-tale island "surrounded by world events, but never touched by them." As such, it probably appeared to the German scholar and to any foreigner traveling through occupied Greece, which was one of those countries tragically impacted by the war. In the first year of the German occupation alone, more than forty thousand Greeks starved to death. By the time of liberation, a further twenty-five thousand had died in the same manner; the Jewish community had been literally wiped out: 879 villages were totally destroyed and a further 460 had been partially devastated. In the face of such a scenario, Athos's alimentary and security problems seemed banal. For Dölger and his German audience, the isolation of the peninsula from the outside world was intrinsically romantic. The fact that four thousands monks and one thousand workers were facing a crisis of survival did not seem to scratch the surface of the icon of the serene fairy-tale island. Athos remained for Dölger a secure jewel box in which art treasures had piled up through the centuries; a "land of knowledge for Byzantinists."[76]

In its "splendid isolation," Athos was nevertheless part of the great "New Order," of the grand scheme for the reorganization of Europe under German

leadership. According to German propaganda, peace, freedom, and well-being were not to be brought by the Anglo-Americans, but by the Europeans themselves. The Germans were engaged in a titanic struggle against the centuries-long meddling of the British, and the threats of American capitalism and Russian Bolshevism. According to a 1942–43 collaborationist tract, Greece resembled "a human organism which awaits strength, health, life from an external source [England and America] and not from its heart [Europe and thus Germany]. [Greece's] national organism ha[d] been saturated with the fearful misfortune of the Jewish spirit . . . it is this spirit that destroys cradles of civilization [and nationalism]."[77]

Physically and temporally remote, Mount Athos was one of the last European outposts the Germans could exploit to promote their "glorious" enterprise. It was on Athos that Fr. Agathangelos's famous manuscript had been retrieved. One of its most famous prophecies was Germany's conversion to Orthodoxy and its capture of Constantinople, which would be subsequently returned to the Greeks.[78] Already popular on Athos before the war, during the German occupation, Agathangelos's prophecies were studied by monks who were seeking to find out "about 'the blond race' and the outcome of the war."[79] Dölger, however, had no need to refer to Agathangelos's obscure prophecies, for the "eternal return of the Byzantine Empire" was more eloquently expressed by Athos's physical geography: "Just as, at sunset, the shadow of the mighty peak of Athos wraps the whole landscape in its cloak, so it is with the great shadow of Byzantium, whose austere contours have shaped the culture of the entire Orthodox world, and shape it still."[80]

Athos as the Gateway to Freedom

In his photographic account, Dölger never missed an opportunity to mention the monks' "greatest friendliness," their "warm hospitality," and even their "excited admiration for the German effort in war and peace." Greeted in more than one monastery by the German flag, Dölger felt his scientific mission had disembarked on a Germanized, or at least philo-German, fairy-tale island.[81]

In order to save the peninsula from German devastation, and from the invasion of Bulgarian troops (Greece's traditional enemy), on April 26, 1941, the Holy Community sent a letter to Hitler himself—as we have seen, the monks' forefathers had done the same in 1423, foreseeing the Fall of Constantinople. With the same diplomatic skill as their predecessors, the monks begged "His

Eminence" to take [the peninsula] under His high protection and custody," wishing "health and long life to the Glorious German Ethnos." Advised by German officials, the vulnerable Athonite fathers, deprived also of their local police, who had been sent to the front, recounted Athos's illustrious history and unique status to the German chancellor. Probably aware of Hitler's admiration for Ancient Greece and Byzantium, the fathers explained that "for over one thousand years the scope and the mission of the monks conducting their ascetic life on the Holy Mountain has been the cultivation of ecclesiastical and classical philology and art, ascetic life, and the continuous prayer for the peace of the entire world." Hitler answered the monks' request positively, and the German army prevented Bulgarian military units from entering the peninsula.[82]

Dölger's excitement reached its peak in the Monastery of Kōnstamonitou, where he saw "a portrait of our Führer in a place of honor in the reception room. A monk found the picture in an illustrated newspaper and used it as a model for a pencil drawing." The habit of hanging rulers' portraits and flags of foreign delegations during an official visit had been a common habit on Athos at least since the First World War. For Dölger, however, the hanging of Hitler's portrait was more than a diplomatic act of courtesy. It allowed the German scholar to demonstrate to his readers "how strongly the personality of the Führer and the Great German Reich impressed the imagination of Athos's inhabitants, in as much as they are not completely turned away from the world. . . . The Führer is considered by very many monks as the great protector of the Holy Mountain, holding his protective hand over it by the New Order."[83]

Strategically located at the end of his book, the Führer's portrait was a true icon to be venerated. In the German imagination, the Mother of God, jealous patroness of the holy peninsula, was now sharing her place above Athos's peak with Hitler's "protective hand." Through the intercession of the Führer, all things were possible:

> We also had the unique chance to photograph a devotional icon. From the Athonite standpoint it was already an extremely good reciprocal feeling that we received the permission to photograph the holy icon, and the monks even helped us with the photographic preparatory work. An old monk who came by and saw these preparations, stroked his head and, turning to us, said: "If you want to photograph the Panaghia, then you shall have little luck, for she never allowed herself to be photographed. It can

be, however, that by you Germans, she might make an exception and allow herself to be photographed, for you Germans stand indeed in a holy war against God's enemy of Bolshevism."[84]

While Dölger and his men were busy admiring Hitler's icon in the elegant reception hall, in the dark cellars of the monastery other men were hiding themselves with the secret complicity of the monks—the same monks who welcomed Dölger with the Nazi flag and a glass of *tsipouro*. The men in hiding were soldiers from the expeditionary force diverted by Churchill from the African front to support Greece at the time of the Italian invasion; and now they were seeking to escape from the German prison camps.

One of the main escape routes for these British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers was through the Chalkidikē Peninsula to Athos. Except for occasional controls, the Germans did not generally interfere with the monks. As with most Greeks, the Athonite monks generally sympathized with the Allies. They felt compassion for the emaciated, often seriously wounded soldiers dressed in the rags. The majority of the monasteries offered fugitive soldiers shelter and food. The physical isolation of the peninsula, combined with its special status and the fathers' philanthropic efforts, soon turned Athos, the Royal Door of Orthodoxy, into a true gateway to freedom for dozens of Allied soldiers bound for neutral Turkey and Allied Egypt.[85]

In occupied Greece, Athos was indeed the last stop for the most incredible escapes. For example, Gunner Barnes, Australian, 2/1 Field Regiment, was taken prisoner at Kalamata on April 30, 1942. He jumped from a train eighty miles north of Thessalonica and wandered through northern Greece. Aided by Greeks for about six weeks, he sailed from Athos to Turkey and thence rejoined his unit. Another Australian, Lance-Corporal Welsh, after obtaining a complete outfit of Greek clothing, slipped out of the Gestapo camp in Thessalonica with a large working party of prisoners who had been employed grooming horses. He hid in a forage store, removed his uniform, and revealing his Greek workman's clothes, he walked out past the guard. Certain Greeks led him to a house where six other soldiers were hiding. He was then guided to Athos, where at length he met a priest and obtained a boat to take seven escapees who had assembled there to Turkey.[86]

In September 1941, the Germans had been informed that a British submarine had fuelled at Vatopedi and had taken onboard some escaping Allied soldiers. Such were this phenomenon's proportions that after the war,

Ouranoupoli's inhabitants circulated the rumor that "the top storey of the little hotel at Daphnē was strictly reserved for escaping officers, and was often full, while German soldiers slept below."[87]

For the monks, on the other hand, things were anything but easy. A transcript issued on May 9, 1941, warned them that "any kind of assistance to subjects of the enemies of the German forces is strictly forbidden. . . . Transgressors will be punished by imprisonment or death." On July 1, 1942, this warning was reiterated, with the addition of deportation to a concentration camp among the list of penalties. Subsequently, the Germans took a series of precautionary measures. A German garrison was installed on Cape Nymphaion. On August 17, 1942, the Athonite monasteries and dependencies were given one week to file a list containing the names of the monks who had served in the Greek army; transgressors were to be punished according to German military law.[88]

On October 18, SS officer Palack was sent to Athos for inspection. He knew what was going on in the basements of the monasteries, in the thick forests, and in the remote hermit cells. The members of the Holy Community reassured him that the rumors about Allies being helped by the monks referred only to isolated cases; that they were not in possession of any official information; that they had recommended the monasteries not aid any British prisoner; and finally, that there were no longer any British on Athos. Athonite abbots were often threatened by German officers that if an Allied refugee was to be found, the entire monastery would be burned out—a technique the Wehrmacht brutally applied in many Greek villages in those years. Despite the intimidation and risks, the fathers' philanthropic mission silently continued.[89]

For Allied refugees, Athos was a world imagined and sensed through the windows of a tiny cell, through familiar and unfamiliar steps and voices, through snowy paths buried by the dense forest, or through the pungent cold of the Mediterranean winter. And yet, despite such fragmentary experiences, Athos was more than merely another stop in their trek toward freedom. It was a symbolic place full of expectations; an icon more alive in their minds than present before their eyes. British wing commander Edward Howell wrote:

For me, Ayon Oros was a gateway—the gateway to freedom. Somehow the intricate web of life had to pass through it and out into the unknown. The sacred mountain was symbolic. Some would linger in the gateway on the brink of discovery, hesitating to launch out into the unknown, fearful of the steps to freedom though eager to attain it. They would see in the lonely

> places of Ayon Oros the pale reflection of their goal. Others, however, would come to this place in their spirits and, seeing the road ahead, would step out boldly to savour the full adventure of freedom itself. These men would pioneer the trail for millions; they would shape the future.[90]

Fragment of Byzantium, abode of ancient myths, or cradle of Western art, after World War II Mount Athos entered the Western geographical imagination through new channels. As fugitives managed to sail off Cape Lavra, they exported their own icon of the Holy Mountain. Postwar Athos circulated in survivors' oral accounts, in memorial books, but especially in war nonfiction.

Officer W. B. Thomas from New Zealand was the protagonist and author of *Dare to Be Free* (1951), one of those popular nonfiction books in tune with European and American Cold War tastes. Wounded in Crete in 1941 and captured by the Germans, Thomas was sent to a specially guarded camp in Thessalonica, from which he eventually managed to escape. Like many of his comrades, he hid for many months among Athos's monasteries before crossing the Aegean and rejoining the Allied troops. During his stay on the peninsula, Thomas met Elder Gabriel, the abbot of Dionysiou Monastery, who also wrote of his own experience with a British refugee. These two testimonies illustrate respectively the outsider's and insider's perspectives. They shed light on parallel paths that invisibly run through Dölger's "fairy-tale island." Thomas and Elder Gabriel's accounts revealed to the public a kinetic net of gazes and actions, intertwining with Athos's physical environment. They constructed Athos as a complex space for adventure in Western and local geographical imagination: exotic for Westerners; simply heroic for Greek readers.

Allied refugees were disguised by the villagers of the bordering towns, now dying their blond hair, now wearing baggy Macedonian pants "in order to make them look somehow shorter." Once they had reached Athos, they found themselves in a different world. Thomas's first encounter with the peninsula was emblematic:[91]

> From the moment I crossed the line of cypress trees which marked the frontier of the Holy Mountain I felt I was stepping back hundreds of years. When, after climbing for half an hour or so, I looked down on a small bay, it was hardly a surprise to see a long narrow craft moving swiftly over the water, with ten, or twelve tall, bearded figures capped and robed to their feet in black cloth, standing at long oars and chanting some weird rhythmic dirge in deep, resonant tones. . . . Presently, in front of me, another of these

> black-robed people appeared winding down the track towards me, sitting side-saddle on a small donkey. As he drew level I found him to be a young boy, probably of fourteen years, with, nevertheless, a sparse, fluffy down on his cheeks and jowl. "God be with you stranger," he called, reining his donkey; "and for where art thou bound?" I felt tempted to reply in old-time speech, he spoke with such Elizabethan grace and charm.[92]

As they crossed the border, Allied refugees engaged in a close dialogue with Athos's complex microgeographies. Abbot Gabriel hid a wounded English soldier in the "tartars of the labyrinth-like building," in the dark cellars narrated with fear by Curzon and other manuscript hunters, for two months. Officer Thomas and many others wandered through similar spaces, as well as through thick woods and steep paths, hiding themselves for even longer periods.[93]

For the fugitives, the geography of Athos became a geography of fear and hope different from the pious topophilia experienced by the Orthodox faithful, or the Western literary topophobia of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers. The key elements of Athos's physical geography were resignified: from garden, vegetation became shelter; from space of fear populated by monsters eating fallen monks and Mardonius's fleet, the sea became a space of hope, beyond which was salvation (this time envisaged not in the heavenly Kingdom, but in the shores of allied Alexandria). Finally, from sublime or picturesque presences, rocks often turned into obstacles. Thomas recalled: "It was a long trip, two days in all. On the first we rounded the end of the peninsula and traveled under the steep and forbidding cliffs of the main Athos ridges. For over three hours we traversed the face of one of the largest landslides in the world, where a tremendous slice of the Mountain had tumbled into the sea."[94]

If the fugitives' perception of Athos was filtered through thick Byzantine walls or shrub curtains, the monks' conceptualization of the outer world was constructed through external fragments as mediated through local preexistent knowledge. In the scenes of the Apocalypse painted on the *exonarthex* of Dionysiou's *katholikón,* Elder Gabriel envisaged a prophetic rendering of war episodes and modern inventions, of which he and the monks had only indirect experience: "In front of this icon painted more than four hundred years ago, one believes that he is looking at a photograph taken during the catastrophe of the contemporary war, with buildings turned upside down and piled, scared people hoarding into underground shelters, among kings and soldiers, and looking with anxiety towards the fire-bombs falling from the sky. . . . In this

image one can clearly distinguish airplanes and the A-bomb dropped by them, the mushroom-like cloud, the piled corpses and disfigured people."[95]

In the same monastery, Officer Thomas could personally compare the monks' mental world map with his own:

> One tall and rather angular [monk] of at least eighty was most interested to hear that I came from the under side of the globe. From a large cupboard in the wall he produced a rough sphere on which the continents of the world had been painted. He demonstrated to the less well informed [monks] where Greece was and then asked me to show them New Zealand. To my chagrin it was not shown on the globe at all, nor was Australia, and I thought they all looked dubious when I maintained that their only globe was some centuries out of date. However, the tall fellow stood by me stoutly. He had been overseas in his youth and always thought upon entering the monastery that the globe was not quite complete. Australia and New Zealand, he explained to his audience, were little places and, like many other small islands, not shown on all the maps.[96]

In the old monk's geographical imagination, New Zealand and Australia were just small, insignificant islands, as compared with Athos's scale. Within Thomas's mental globe (which he implicitly opposed to the elders' old and vaguely painted sphere), Athos remained a "strange little kingdom" not very dissimilar from Dölger's fairy-tale island; an enchanted, almost unreal place, infested by the Germans, but escaping the chaos of the New Order. He wrote: "As I gazed at the great ramparts [of Simonopetra] towering above, with their billowing white clouds, I thought how near it was all to my conception of a fairy castle. . . . The view outside was enchanting. The outer wall seemed to be built flush with the edge of the cliff, and one looked as though from an airplane down to a limitless expanse of sea over a mile below."[97]

However, if for the New Zealander Mount Athos was an island "outside of the world," in Elder Gabriel's eschatological geopolitical imagination, Athos constituted a vital part of Greece's "mutilated body politic." "The national soul," the monk wrote, "sees [Mount Athos] there, in the midst of the Greek Aegean, as a broadcaster and receiver of infinite Greek-Christian energy. It sees it, it longs for it, it wants it, as it eternally stands there, between Saint Sophia and the Parthenon, as an indissoluble symbol of great civilizations and the ark of the ethno-religious traditions of our Race."[98]

For the abbot, Athos was a unique container of ethno-religious tradition,

within the broader spatial container of the "natural" Greek nation-state ("unnaturally" mutilated by the Turks). In light of the naturalized geopolitics of World War II, the conception of a closed globe of racially and culturally homogeneous nation-states owning the status of biological organisms had been definitely naturalized, even within the thick Byzantine walls of Athos's monasteries. Athos's physical prominence and geographical location helped naturalize its role within an imagined "Great Hellas," a transhistorical geopolitical organism which extended from Athens to Constantinople, and contained the (supposed) racial and geographical projection of classical and Byzantine civilization. If Dölger projected the European New Order onto the Byzantine Empire, in Abbot Gabriel's mind it was the chimeric vision of a resurrected Byzantium (marked by Greek racial uniformity) that would restore an eternal New Order. In the Athonite elder's mind, the racial continuity between ancient and modern Greeks, disrupted by Fallmerayer's theories, was alive and well, and destined to endure for eternity—like Athos itself.

Ironically, the Holy Mountain remained an isolated fairy-tale island or anomalous organism in both the Germans' and Allies' geographical imaginations. From Dölger to Thomas, but also from Robert Byron to Strzygowski, from Luke to Viereck, and from Halliburton to Fallmerayer, Athos represented an escape from the cruelty and predictability of the laws of naturalized geopolitics. But Athos's isolation was only a partial one: if tanks, bombs, and bloody conflicts remained outside of its boundaries, organic and racial theories penetrated them, taking on new shapes and functions. While modern technology seemed to annihilate physical distances and chances for new geographical discovery, Byzantine history was rediscovered as a third dimension. Athos allowed Europeans and Americans to perforate the Mackinderian closed globe and jump a thousand years back into an unexplored realm. In this sense, the Holy Mountain represented a gateway to freedom for many people other than the Allied refugees, long before, as well as after, World War II.

6

SCIENTIFIC ATHOS

Mountains, it has been suggested, are "nothing but islands on the land." Characterized by different altitudinal microhabitats, like islands, mountains have long been envisioned by natural scientists as ideal laboratories. Mountains contain high biological diversity. "Because elevation, relief and aspect change markedly over short distances, mountains are excellent places in which to study human and physical processes," the physical geographer Donald Friend notes. Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798), the German naturalist who accompanied Cook's second voyage, was particularly impressed by Table Mountain in Cape Town because of its insular resemblance, "in the sense of being a circumscribed physiographic form upon which processes could be observed operating."[1]

Lofty peaks have been privileged sites for the production of scientific knowledge since classical antiquity. Pliny informs us of people who, in order to do research on plants, wandered through mountain wildernesses. Similarly, Theophrastus and Philo preserve accounts of strange characters who observed the heavens from high peaks. Two thousand years later, Sir George Wheeler (1693) was hurrying to Olympus and Parnassus, searching for rare plants or for herbs mentioned by these ancient authorities. By the beginning of the following century, mountain herb gathering in the Levant had become a pastime so popular that even French royal collectors of antiquities, like Paul Lucas, traveled under the disguise of apothecaries after various healing plants.[2]

As a "mountain quasi-island," Athos has probably impacted the imagination

of Western natural scientists as have few other peaks in the Mediterranean region. The peninsula of Athos is indeed a unique place in many respects. It differs from its surroundings and from the rest of Greece not only historically and institutionally, but also naturalistically. Unlike the neighboring peninsulas of Sithōnía and Kassándra, Athos is the continuation of the Rhodope massif and presents a varied geomorphologic structure. This, of course, has climatic implications. While the other two fingers of the Chalkidikē are characterized by a uniform, typically Mediterranean climate, Athos (unlike most high peaks) sustains a variety of microclimates from the sea level up to 6,670 feet—from the Mediterranean to the alpine.[3]

What has made Athos appear unique to Western natural scientists, however, is above all its vegetation. Athos's forbidding terrain, geographic isolation, absence of grazing animals, and a monastic way of life which has not yet attacked the surrounding environment have all contributed to the preservation of ancient floristic species and the survival of twenty-eight endemics. Occupied by cultivated land over only 5 to 10 percent of its surface, Mount Athos is the most forested part of Greece. Its more than 1,400 taxa and its 350 species of mushrooms form a unique mixture which is seldom found in such a small area as the peninsula's 130 square miles. In the words of the theologian Jean-Paul Larchet, this insular natural variety makes Mount Athos, unlike most mountain ecologies, "a microcosm which summarizes the entire world," and the "botanical totality of Eden."[4]

As we saw in chapter 2, Athos is figured as the "Garden of the Mother of God," and the monks as the landscapers of the garden, as their terraced cultivations still testify. Athonite monks, however, also envisage themselves as the perpetuators of a long Byzantine botanical tradition rooted in ancient Greece. Herbalists trained in the pharmacological writings of Dioscorides (ca. AD 70), and herb gardens are attested at Athos's monasteries since the Byzantine period. Saint Athanasius himself is said to have healed the sore foot of a fellow monk by gathering some wild herbs and pounding them into a paste which he applied to the skin and covered with a bandage of tree leaves. Officer Thomas, the World War II refugee from New Zealand, likewise referred to the "vegetal" cures of the hermit who took care of his wounded leg. But if locals exploited Athos's plants mainly for practical purposes, Western botanists conceptualized the Garden of the Mother of God as a true botanical garden. Sociologists later came to envisage it as a human laboratory.[5]

David Livingstone, among others, has emphasized the importance of place

in the construction of scientific knowledge. Islands have been privileged spaces for science-making. Physically self-enclosed entities, islands are, unlike the unbounded world, manageable in terms of size. They enable the study of newness and complexity within familiar bounds. They allow and stimulate an experience of the empirical in circumscribed terms. Athos's physical configuration has probably contributed to the scientific fame of the peninsula no less significantly than its internal natural as well as human variety. Its diversity of species and ethnicities is contained (and thus made reassuring) by its coastal boundaries. Its readability to the Western eye has been further encouraged by the panoptical arrangement of the peninsula, topped by the majestic summit. Through the centuries, Athos has thus proved an ideal space for mapping, a place instigating "mental order," or simply helping the imposition of order upon nature and society.[6]

Premodern Scientific Athos

Cosmographic Athos

Though traditionally known in the West primarily for its mythical past and eternal sacredness, it was through the channel of natural science that Athos first entered the medieval European geographical imagination. Sir John Mandeville's *Travels,* a guide for pilgrims bound for Jerusalem (1356), was one of the most popular travel accounts of the Middle Ages, and among the first to provide a description of Mount Athos:

> There is also another hill which men call Athos; and that is so high that its shadow stretches to Lemnos, which is distant from it nearly seventy-eight miles. Upon these hills the air is so clear and so pure that no wind can be felt there; and so no animal can be seen there; and so no animal nor bird can live there, for the air is so dry. And men say in those countries that once wise men went up on the hills and held to their noses sponges soaked with water to catch the air, for the air was so dry. And also up on those hills they wrote letters in the dust with their fingers, and at the end of a year they went up again and found the same letters that they had written the day before as fresh as they were on the first day, without any defect. And therefore it certainly appears that these hills pass beyond the clouds to the pure air.[7]

Mount Athos, the highest peak described by Pomponius Mela and other ancient authors, was alive in the Western medieval imagination as a mythical site with peculiar physical characteristics; a site where nature was as pure as any saint's relics, not decaying at all; a site for scientific observation accessible only to "wise men" (fig. 50). The mythical aura surrounding Athos's peak extended to its venerable visitors. By climbing it, they set themselves outside of the ordinary world. Isolation from human society has traditionally been accepted as a necessary precondition for scientific research, whether on mountaintops or in the lab. Isolation helps scientists suggest the achievement of a closer contact with truth. In this sense, Athos, too, represented an island "outside of this world" not only for the monks, but also for Mandeville's natural philosophers and for later scientists.[8]

The circulation of Athos as a visual sacred icon was also indebted to the scientific tradition. Komnēnos's first coastal profile of Athos (see fig. 23) was probably derived from a map first published in the 1588 edition of Belon's *Les observations de plusieurs singularitez & choses mémorables trouvées en Grèce, Asie, Judée, Egypte, Arabie & autres pays étranges* (see fig. 51). Pierre Belon du Mans was the apothecary of Cardinal de Touron, minister of François I, and a pioneer in taxonomy and comparative anatomy. On his way to Constantinople in 1546, he paid a visit to Mount Athos, climbed its peak, and concluded that "the multitude of springs and streams, the variety of herbage and evergreens, the woods and pleasant shoar, do all render Mount Athos one of the most charming places in the world": a true botanical *"paradis de délices."* The 1588 map reflected Belon's Renaissance conceptualization of nature as a cabinet of curiosities in which different vegetal and animal species were literally embalmed.[9]

A mythical majestic peak and a quasi-island, a microcosm and an extraordinary observation point, Athos came to embody the cosmographic dream. The Renaissance cosmographer was identified with the allegorical figure of the "insulist" on his island ascending to its highest peak in order to observe "the coast developed symmetrically around him, inscribed on the sprawling sea as if on the rectitude of a map." The island topped by a high peak allowed the cosmographer to represent order over against the chaos of nature. As observed from its top, the coast of the Athonite peninsula marked out a well-defined line—one between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the rational and the irrational. It acted as the boundary of a large-scale botanical garden.[10]

Fig. 50. *Wise Men on the Summit of Mount Athos,* Mandeville, ca. 1410–20. (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved [Harley MS 3954])

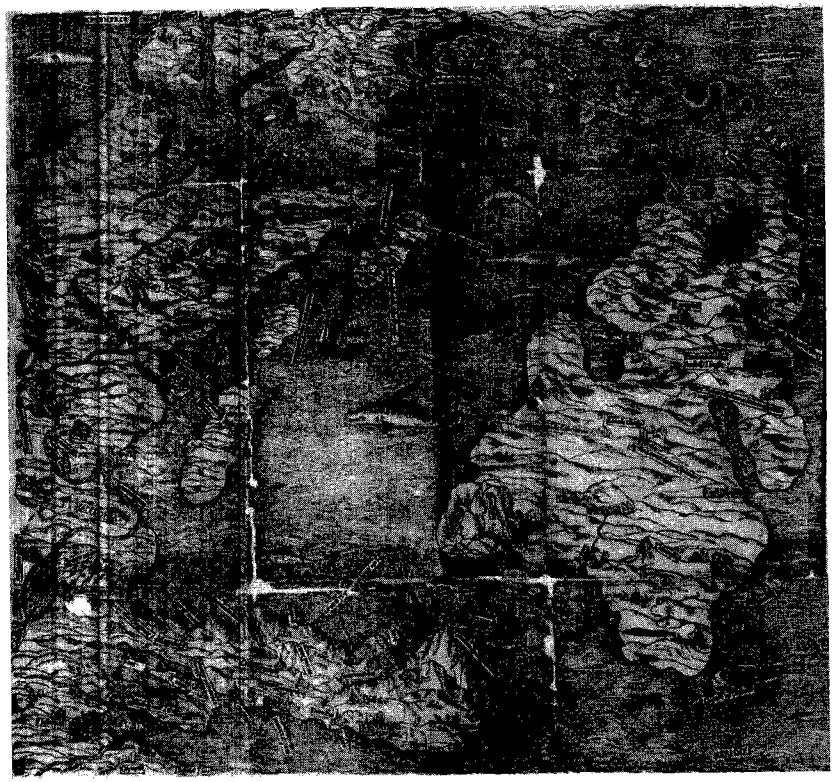


Fig. 51. Pierre Belon, map of Lemnos and Mount Athos, 1588. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

Antiquarian Taxonomy and Linnaean Athos

Belon was a precursor of the Western naturalists who conceptualized Athos as a naturally self-enclosed taxonomical space. In 1787, John Sibthorp, Sherrardian Professor of Botany at Oxford, first visited Athos as part of what could be considered a modern scientific expedition to the Levant. His travel companions were John Hawkins, a wealthy Cornish gentleman interested in geology; Ferdinand Bauer, a young German draftsman who later embarked on Matthew Flinders's voyage to Australia; and the Scottish captain Ninian Imrie.[11]

The expedition was aimed at collecting organic and mineral specimens and especially at compiling an exhaustive Linnaean taxonomy of the Greek flora and fauna. Such an ambitious enterprise reflected the broader globalizing

Fig. 52. View of Mount Athos on the frontispiece of Sibthorp's *Flora Graeca*, vol. 2, 1813. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

project of Enlightenment natural history: the representing, classifying, and ordering of the world. The *Flora Graeca Sibthorpiana* (1806–40), a ten-volume leather-bound folio illustrated with Bauer's 966 hand-colored illustrations, was the main outcome of Sibthorp's and Hawkins's travels to the Levant. It was also one of the most extraordinary contributions to the Linnaean project, as one of the greatest eighteenth-century "national taxonomies." As with Linnaeus's *Flora Svedica,* Lamarck's *Flore Française,* or Lightfoot's *Flora Scotica,* Sibthorp's *Flora Graeca* sought to enumerate in a rigorous "scientific fashion" natural plenitude within a territorial container, that is, the nation-state. The difference, however, was that, unlike Sweden or France, eighteenth-century Ottoman Greece was not yet a formal container. Sibthorp's *Flora* scientifically supported the classicist and patriotic vision of a timeless Hellas.[12]

Mount Athos astounded Sibthorp. On the frontispiece of volume 2, the Holy Mountain was represented as a Romantic, almost alpine, green idyll. It was the naturalist's botanical paradise, with its abundance of "natural productions" waiting to be labeled, to be "baptized" by the party of new "scientific Adams" (fig. 52). On the frontispiece of volume 8, Athos's grey cone surrounded by the stormy waters of the Aegean assumed an almost dramatic tone (fig. 53). It was "the grand conical figure with an insular appearance" that Sibthorp and his fellows contemplated from the ship approaching from Lemnos. It was also the mythical peak which helped the Argonauts and ancient sailors to orient themselves, and the tempestuous point of Mardonius's shipwreck. It was a textual Athos alive in the team's classical imagination. Fusing practical realities with imaginative constructions, Mount Athos served as an icon of *Flora*'s "two souls"—the green and the antiquarian.[13]

It was the classicist's opinion that a three- or four-year residence in Greece and Asia Minor would enable the "learned and intelligent naturalist" to provide "valuable illustrations of various passages in the works of Aristotle, Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Aelian, and Pliny." The plants of Greece, we read in the introduction to Sibthorp's *Florae Graecae Prodromus* (1806–13), had been recorded by authors as ancient as Homer. These ancient plants, however, had "never been adequately described by any systematic botanist," as "barbarousness infected with its violence the morals of men over the whole area and thus made investigation of its natural products a very difficult and dangerous task for foreign travelers." It was only thanks to Sibthorp's "adventurous mind" and scientific knowledge that ancient plants could be identified and classified in Linnaeus's taxonomic system.[14]

Fig. 53. View of Mount Athos on the frontispiece of Sibthorp's *Flora Graeca*, vol. 8, 1833. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

Sibthorp was also interested in discovering how far the learning and medical practice of ancient botanists and physicians had survived among modern Greeks. He found that the modern Greek language was "not so much corrupted as one should suppose," and often plants' and animals' names reflected their ancient denominations. Certain eighteenth-century philhellenes and nineteenth-century politicians regarded the study of the natural sciences as fundamental to the process of nation building. Through the identification of "classical" species or herbal practices, they could easily restore the link between modern and ancient Greece: they could provide the Hellenic ideal with solid "scientific" grounding.[15]

Hawkins and Imrie were also good classicists. They, too, contributed to the "antiquarian taxonomy" of Greece, and more broadly to the Linnaean "textualization and objectification of the world." What Sibthorp did with plants, Hawkins and Imrie sought to achieve with minerals, though on a much less ambitious scale. They traveled through ancient mountains and archaeological sites collecting mineral specimens and surveying monuments. Their geological cabinets not only included fragments of rock, but also fragments of monuments, for example, from the steps leading to the Bath of Pythia, from Hadrian's Pantheon, the Temple of Theseus, and the Monument of Lysicrates.[16]

Mount Athos was a special place for all the members of Sibthorp's party. Its "assemblage of natural beauty," Imrie stated, was "beyond description." Sibthorp was struck by the "great diversity of plants, which are sheltered by the shade of the trees, and protected by the superstition of the caloyers from being browsed on by the goats." Hanging vineyards, fruit gardens, and "the somber hue of the cypress" made the peninsula a true Eden whose ancient plants waited only to be classified. The Monastery of Ivēron became a "Grecian Elysium." Much of Athos's botanical charm was revealed in its spectacular contrasts: "On landing, I found the rock almost blue with the autumnal Scylla, and in the shade under the cover of the trees was the Cyclamen; above hanging cliffs, the yellow Amaryllis all in flower. This was a cheerful sight to a botanist who had just left the sun-burnt plains of Lemnos, and the arid rocks of Imbros. . . . At Daphnē, the bay mixed with the wild-olive was spread over the rocks: a rivulet flowing down, watered the roots of huge plane trees, around which the Smilax was entwined diffusing from its flowers a graceful odour." The sea surrounding the peninsula also hosted ancient taxonomic treasures. A pinna brought up by one of Sibthorp's fellow sailors, for example, contained within

its shell two shrimplike animals: "the watchful cancri so beautifully described by Oppian."[17]

Athos's floral variety kept Sibthorp busy gathering specimens for his herbarium. He also collected seeds and bulbs for the "Plantation sacred to Greece" which he had raised in the Oxford Physic Garden, and for the Royal Gardens at Kew, one of the greatest botanical centers in Europe. From his first journey alone, Sibthorp compiled a list of 450 plants, and during his second visit, he gathered seeds from no fewer than 1,500 species. At the same time, Bauer tirelessly sketched Athos's innumerable plant species. Time limits and the fact that "the season for botanizing is so short at these latitudes" placed tremendous pressure on Sibthorp and his draftsman. Bauer employed a code equating colors with a numeric scale. In this way, he could complete his pencil sketches later within the closed and better-equipped space of his atelier. Unlike Edward Lear's textual notes on the colors to be employed, Bauer's numeric code enabled scientific precision. Through the championing of vegetal, animal, and mineral species, microcosmic Athos was decomposed in order to be transported, reassembled, and better examined within the familiar space of other distant microcosms. Order was inscribed onto the peninsula through the naturalists' combination of discursive and embodied practices—through their gazes and their movements.[18]

On the first trip, Sibthorp and his companions ascended Athos's peak. For the masculine Enlightenment natural scientist, "scaling the highest mountains, climbing the most rugged rocks" was a way to tame nature. As Sibthorp and his companions moved upward, "trees became scarce; and the higher regions of the mountain rose naked above [them]." Sibthorp found no snow on the summit, but was rewarded by the richness of *plantae sylvaticae* and by "all those trees which [he] had found in different parts of Greece," and especially by "some which [he] had not seen elsewhere."[19]

The peak of the Holy Mountain also rewarded Imrie with a real trophy: a piece of primitive marble "taken from the highest summit of Mount Athos." Sibthorp's endemic plants and Imrie's Athonite marble were precious because they were *rare*. For the antiquarian collector as much as for the Enlightenment naturalist, an object's value was measured by its rarity. On Athos, rarity was to be found in its highest regions, after a physically demanding climb, the same undertaken by the surveyor after the view from above, and by the pilgrim after a closer contact with the divine.[20]

Athos was a unique site for collecting, but it was also a remarkable site to collect. It was one of the ancient peaks conquered by Sibthorp and his team. As such, it featured in Imrie's *Catalogue of Specimens* (1817) alongside Helicon and Parnassus. Athos was portrayed from sea level, as an insular microcosm of rocks and trees (fig. 54). Athos's was a self-contained, almost domesticated sublimity. Monasteries, chapels, and Athos's summit were accurately numbered and catalogued. For Imrie and Sibthorp, the Athonite peninsula was a natural place for display. On board their ship, the naturalists passed by and admired Athos's picturesque sequence of monasteries and "romantic ravines" as if walking through a gallery, or a museum.[21]

Athos was neither the first nor the last microcosm visited by the party of naturalists. Their entire journey and scientific work could be mapped on a series of bounded insular spaces "beyond Athos": Lemnos, Imvros, Samothrákē,

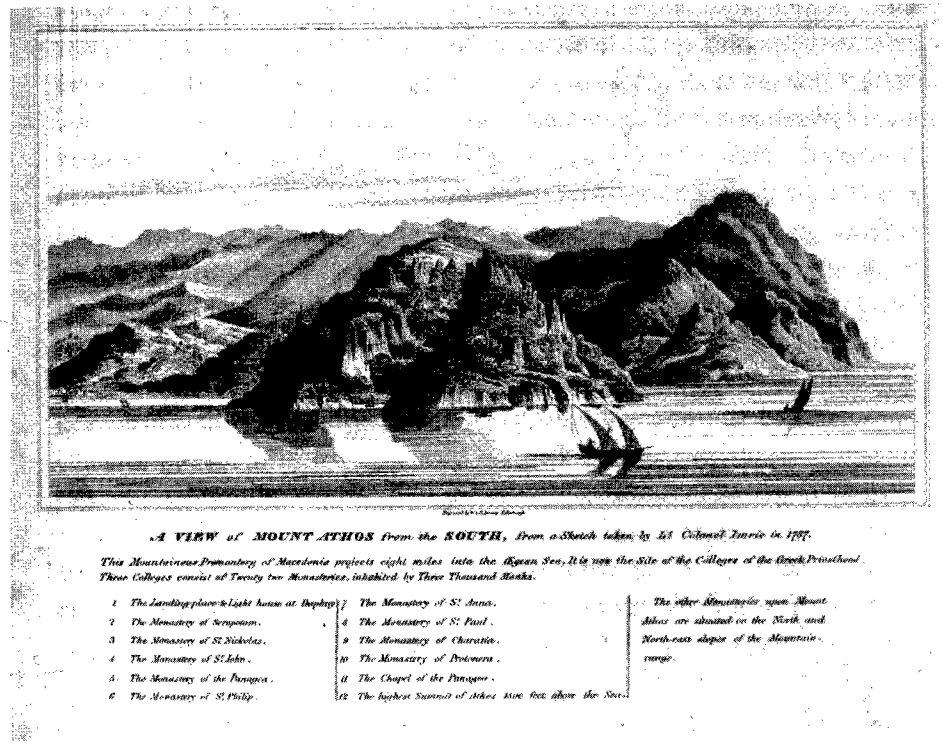


Fig. 54. View of Mount Athos from the sea in Imrie's *Catalogue of Specimens*, 1817. (The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

Lesvos, and so on. Annotated drawings, along with the seeds, animal species, and soil and rock samples collected in the course of the journey, were circulated through a selective but complex net of cabinets, botanical gardens, and museums. Sibthorp's *Flora,* among the costliest botanical works ever produced, was printed in twenty-five copies only and thus scarcely available to the public. Hawkins's geological cabinet, which he maintained in his luxurious London apartment on Chandos Street, was open to the crème de la crème of the European scientific community. Alexander von Humboldt visited it in 1790 and defined its owner as "an excellent mineralogist." Shortly before his death, Imrie donated his mineral collection to the Museum of the University of Edinburgh.[22]

Humboldtian Athos

One of *Flora*'s readers was August Grisebach, a German botanist who ventured to Athos in 1839. The representation of Athos on the cover of the eighth volume struck him. It was so accurate that he could clearly recognize his way on that side of the mountain. Unlike Sibthorp's, however, Grisebach's was not a sea but rather a land approach to Athos and to its "natural productions." Nineteenth-century botany was characterized by two distinct traditions of inquiry: the floristic and the morphological. Each tradition worked through different geographies and produced different geographical imaginations. Tracing its origins back to Linnaeus, the former was concerned mainly with the taxonomical classification of species and paralleled British oceanic expansion. The latter emerged with Alexander von Humboldt's continental explorations in South America and concentrated on the geographical distribution of vegetation and its relation to environmental parameters. Together with climatic and geological agents, plants and other biological organisms were a fundamental integrating part of the cosmos, "one living, active whole animated by one sole impulse."[23]

Humboldt accused Linnaean botanists of focusing "on a very small portion of that science," occupied as they were with the discovery of new plant species and their classification. While retaining a strong taxonomic component within botanical practice, Humboldt was more attracted by "the connection of facts which have been long observed [than by] the knowledge of insulated facts, although they be new." He stated that he would much rather know "the exact elevational limits of an already known species than discover fifteen new."[24]

A landlocked Prussian, a mining official rather than a naval officer, Humboldt spent five years exploring the interior of South and Central America. His was a kind of voyage self-consciously different from Cook's Pacific island-hopping; one serving territorial unity rather than insular knowledge; privileging synthesis over insulated facts, and measurement over collection. As the holistic history of nature was to overcome the "artificial" Linnaean descriptions, "physical portraits" took precedence over "florilegia" and hydrographic charts.[25]

Sibthorp's and Imrie's journeys were part of the Linnaean tradition; Grisebach's of the Humboldtian. Grisebach self-consciously continued Humboldt's program for a comprehensive plant geography. He soon came to be regarded as one of its leading exponents. Like Humboldt, he was interested in the correlations between plant communities' distribution and that of the physical features of the landscape. He meant to expand Humboldt's project, to which he had personally contributed, on the basis of newly available measurements and observations in different regions of the globe. Grisebach's *Vegetation der Erde* (1872) contained descriptions of no fewer than fifty-four categories of plants with regional distinctions, a number three times greater than Humboldt's. The work was soon translated into French and plagiarized by Francesco Ardissone, a professor at the University of Milan.[26]

While Humboldt gained much of his fame after his journey to the Andes, Grisebach owed his popularity to his botanical exploration of Thrace, Macedonia, Albania, and Bithynia (1839), after which he obtained his first job at Göttingen. If Sibthorp's Aegean island-hopping reflected on a small-scale Cook's or Finley's scientific journeys through the Pacific islands, Grisebach's land route through the Balkans consciously mimicked Humboldt's South American transect. Humboldt wrote in his *Cosmos* (1858): "I have enjoyed an advantage which few scientific travelers have shared to an equal extent, viz., that of having seen not only the littoral districts, such as are alone visited by the majority of those who take part in voyages of circumnavigation, but also those portions of the interior of two vast continents which present the most striking contrasts manifested in the alpine tropical landscapes of South America, and the dreary wastes of the steppes in Northern Asia."[27]

Grisebach, who had read Humboldt's South American account, regarded his own enterprise as no less important: great Royal Navy surveyors, he noticed, had limited themselves to the coasts of Greece and Asia Minor. Few researchers had ventured into the interior, and none had ever described it in the form

of a logbook. While bordering directly on his homeland, these lands remained "very much under-examined, as a large extent of Asia or America."[28]

The vivid tropical pictures in Humboldt's South American account inflamed Grisebach's geographical imagination. Humboldtian observations, particularly of the altitudinal zonation of vegetation, were zealously recorded in his logbook. What Humboldt claimed to have experienced in the Andes, the young botanist sought in the mountains of Rumelia. If, during the past century, oceanic explorers transposed the geography of classical Greece to Pacific atolls and tropical islands, Grisebach made the poetic spaces of classical antiquity "tropical." As a result of this inverse process of spatial poeticization, Mount Athos came to represent for Grisebach what Mount Chimborazo meant for Humboldt. The latter had employed the Ecuadorian peak in his huge engraving which accompanied the *Physical Portrait of the Tropics* (1807) to exemplify his geographical vision. The mountain, which appeared again in Berghaus's *Atlas* (1850), embedded "all the phenomena that the surface of our planet and the surrounding atmosphere present to the observer . . . the general results of five years in the tropics" (fig. 55).[29]

The majestic mountain, which was deemed to be the highest in the world, condensed huge expanses of territory into a single vertical ascent. In a perpendicular rise of 20,565 feet, "the various climates succeed one another, layered one on top of the next like strata." To Grisebach, Mount Athos looked just as extraordinary. Nowhere in Europe, the German botanist claimed, had he seen vegetation as luxuriant as that which existed on the Athonite peninsula. It took him only a short preliminary excursion in the Karyés area to understand how Sibthorp had managed to compile his list of 450 plants. Far more vigorous and rich than the vegetal life on the Dalmatian islands, Athos's vegetation could only be compared to "the vivid representations through which the travelers have transmitted us the incomparable organic nature of the Tropics." To the peninsula he dedicated over one-third of his account.[30]

Mount Athos was fascinating not just because it could persuade the traveler through Rumelia that he had "suddenly entered a new region," but because, like Humboldt's Chimborazo, "the geological image of vegetation, time and space, history and geography, [were] subjected to the naturalist's gaze." On Athos, as well as in the tropics, global order was made "locally visible." In order to grasp and describe the system of laws regulating vegetational patterns and variations, the naturalist needed to take systematic measurements at different altitudes. Grisebach believed in the Humboldtian notion that plants and organic forces

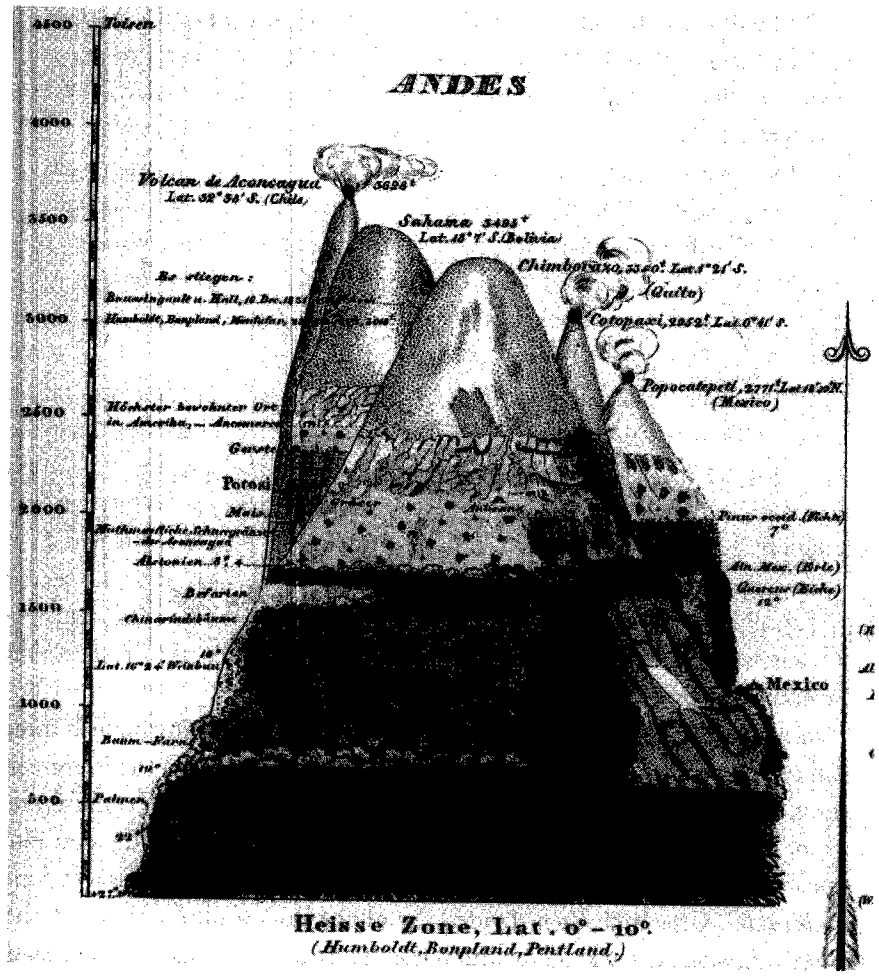


Fig. 55. Mount Chimborazo and other prominent Andean peaks in Berghaus's *Physikalischer Schul-Atlas zum Kosmos von Alexander von Humboldt,* 1850.

were distributed over the globe through mathematically determinable lines, and were thus measurable like heat or magnetism. Demonstrating that the changes in plant distribution by altitude matched the ones by latitude, Humboldt implicitly exalted the microcosmic nature of mountains.[31]

> Among the colossal mountains of Cundinamarca, of Quito, and of Peru, furrowed by deep ravines, man is enabled to contemplate alike all the families of plants. . . . There, at a single glance the eye surveys majestic palms,

> humid forests of bambusa, and the varied species of Musaceae, while above these forms of tropical vegetation appear oaks, medlars, the sweet-brier, and umbelliferous plants, as in Europeans' homes. . . . There the depths of the earth and the vaults of heaven display all the richness of their forms and the variety of their phenomena. There the different climates are ranged the one above the other, stage by stage, like the vegetable zones, whose succession they limit; and there the observer may readily trace the laws that regulate the diminution of heat, as they stand indelibly inscribed on the rocky walls and abrupt declivities of the Cordilleras.[32]

This scheme was reflected not only in Grisebach's scientific conceptualization of Mount Athos, but also in his physical experience of place and in the narrative structure of the resulting account. The German botanist distinguished Athos's wooded promontory (which he named Holy Forest) from the peak proper. The account of his journey was articulated in the form of a logbook. It began from the Holy Forest and culminated on Athos's peak. Grisebach took the reader through different altitudinal belts, as he moved on mule-back "through the luxuriant woods and the successive crests of the promontory, like the naturalist who enters the primeval forests of South America."[33]

On Athos, as on Etna, Grisebach argued, one could easily distinguish three main regions, which were limited in the following manner: (1) the evergreen region, 0–1,329 feet; (2) the wooded region, 1,329–6,181 feet; and (3) the alpine region, 6,181–6,670 feet. The wooded region, in turn, could be divided into a spruce-forest zone, a laricio-forest zone, and a deciduous-tree forest zone (*Laubwalde*). Grisebach then diyided the alpine region into a fir-forest and an herb-vegetation zone. Such altitudinal subdivision, Grisebach suggested, could be used for the sake of comparison with other mountains. The reproduction of Athos's altitudinal zonation in his main work, *Vegetation der Erde,* more than thirty years later confirmed his appreciation of the Holy Mountain as a Humboldtian model and the lasting impact of his Athos experience on his scholarship and imagination.[34]

Grisebach's understanding of Athos was not purely scientific. Like Humboldt's Andean journey, Grisebach's ascent constituted an overwhelmingly aesthetic and emotional experience. Echoing Schiller's notion that "freedom is in the mountains," on the top of the Chimborazo and other majestic Andean peaks, Humboldt was pervaded by a sense of inner calm. "These vapors,

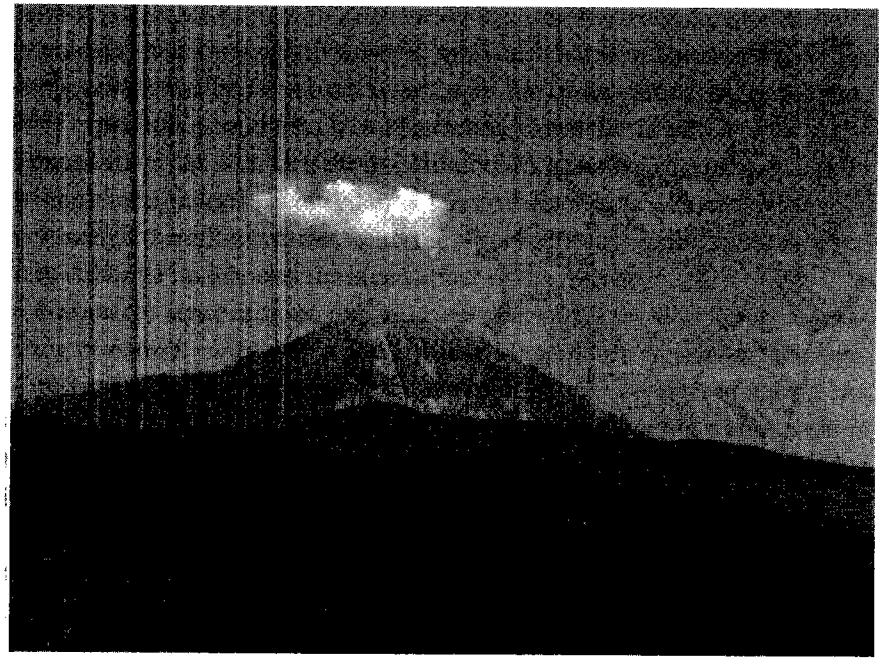


Fig. 56. The summit of Athos with its "hat," as it would have been observed by Grisebach. (Photograph by Fr. Apolló Docheiarite)

circulating around the rocky ridge, soften its . . . outline, temper the effects of light, and give the landscape that aspect of calmness and repose, which arises from the harmony of forms and colors." On the top of Athos, Grisebach experienced a similar sensation:[35]

> This panoramic view should move even the most impoverished fantasy, [for] it unites so many famous mountains and islands of antiquity in a single line of vision. Yet the tableau in the foreground . . . is much richer, livelier, and more stimulating. Large shapes and dazzling colors speak directly to the sensitive mind. The steep ravines, the high marble rocks, the manifold green, the indigo and lapis blue all produce a very similar effect on the eye to that caused on the ear by powerful harmonious sounds. The sense of landscape, like the musical ear, is an innate quality, and can be partially formed by beautiful impression. But if abrupt contrasts have their greatest effect in this sphere, it is the proximity of the sea to the wildest [rocky] formations that lends a calming character to the grandeur of nature.[36]

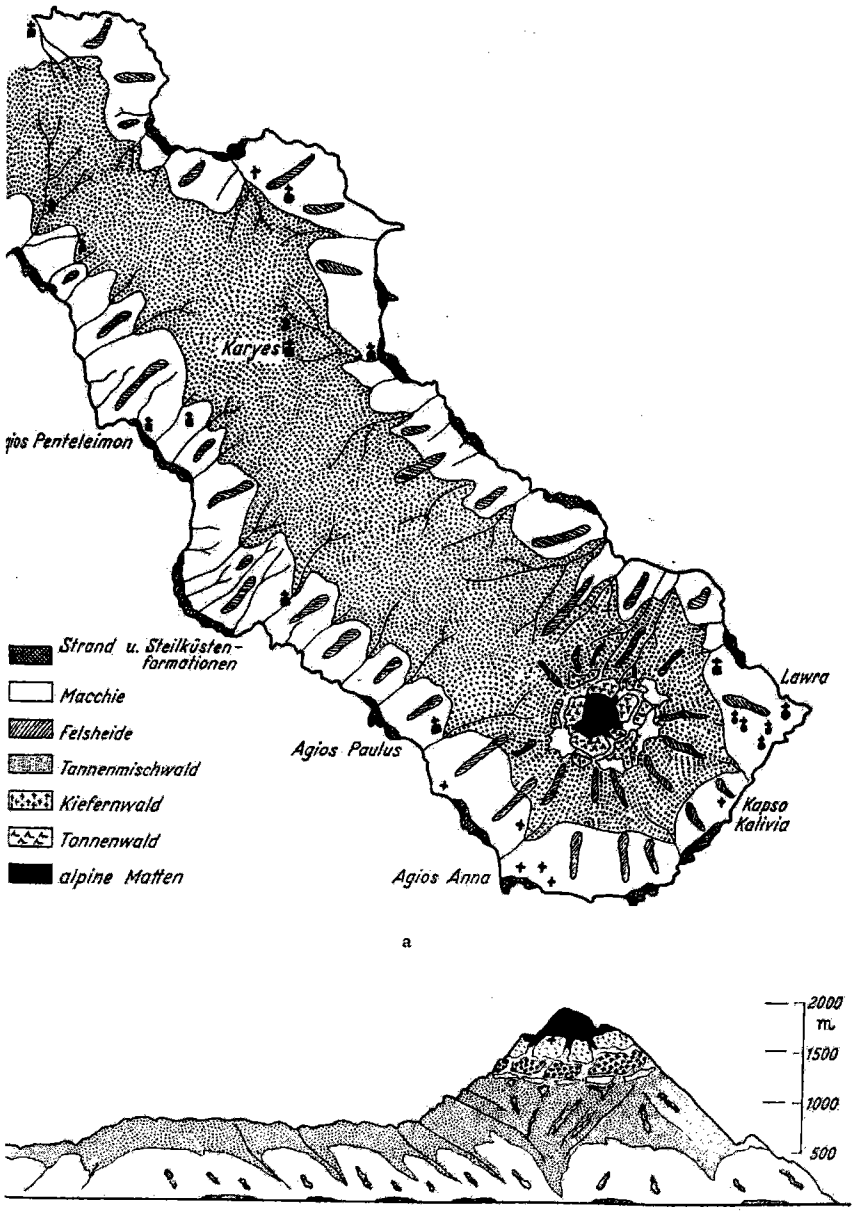


Fig. 57. Rauh's map and profile of Mount Áthos flora's altitudinal zonation, in W. Rauh, *Klimatologie und Vegetationsverhältnisse der Athos-Halbinsel und der ostägäischen Inseln Lemnos, Evstratios, Mytilene und Chios* (Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1949, p. 565). (Reprinted with permission of Springer-Verlag)

Calm was derived from the visual mastering of the surrounding natural elements and their conceptualization as parts of a harmonious whole. But the whole envisioned by Grisebach was simply the transposition of what Humboldt experienced on the rock of Manimimi, above the Great Cataract of the Orinoco River. As with Grisebach's, Humboldt's gaze was charmed mostly by the contrasting effects produced by colors and vegetation. The gloomy tints of rock caused the same contrast "with the silvery splendor of the foam," like the steep Athonite ravines and the blue surface of the Aegean.[37]

Grisebach's sense of calm, too, ultimately derived from his panoptical mastering of nature, of its visible and invisible forces. It derived from "the consciousness of finding [himself] at the center of the great theater of nature." As he confessed in his introduction to *Vegetation der Erde,* finding within nature's harmonious order "conviction, enjoyment, and calm" was for him "a stimulus for the soul and a source of happiness."[38]

Grisebach's gaze was not limited to vegetational and climatic phenomena on Athos; it also penetrated into the most obscure geological recesses of the mountain-peninsula. While the Linnaean Imrie gathered rare specimens from different areas of Athos, the Humboldtian Grisebach aimed at exploring the dynamic volcanic forces that gave the peninsula form and life through hypotheses he had formulated on the spot. While the Scottish Royal Naval officer was satisfied with Athos's exterior sea view (fig. 54), the German naturalist's scientific imagination extended well below the surface. Intending to reveal a deeper meaning from the underlying three-dimensional structure of Athos, Grisebach deconstructed the peninsula into seven geological units: the chalkstone of Pantocrator, the glistening slate of the Holy Forest, the glistening slate on the pirates' gorge, the quartz boulder mass of Aghiou Pavlou, the marble of Athos, the marble enclosure ring in the glistening slate of the Holy Forest, and the conglomerate of Athos.[39]

Grisebach's approach to Mount Athos, as a Humboldtian integrated botanical and geological laboratory and observatory for climatic phenomena, remained influential. New field research kept building upon his model. One century after the publication of Grisebach's account, the German botanist Werner Rauh gave visual expression to Athos's altitudinal vegetal variation through observations and photographs taken within the different "belts." These were given coherence by the sketch of a profile Grisebach must have envisioned several times in his mind (fig. 57).

Since Grisebach's time, Athos had remained a powerful magnet for German-

speaking natural scientists. Even after World War II, scientific scholarship on the Holy Mountain continued to be overwhelmingly German. Perhaps Grisebach's Athonite experience ended up also touching his master. Maybe it is not the case that, in order to rise to the highest point on earth, Humboldt piled Athos on the top of his favorite mountain: "If we were even to picture to ourselves Mount Pilatus placed on Schreckhorn, or the Schneekoppe of Silesia on Mont Blanc, we should not have attained to the height of that great Colossus of the Andes, the Chimborazo, whose height is twice that of Mount Aetna; *and we must pile the Righi, or Mount Athos, on the summit of Chimborazo, in order to form a just estimate of the elevation of the Dhawalagiri, the highest point of the Himalaya.*"[40]

Modern Scientific Athos

Ecological Athos

In 1920, the British officer Alan Ogilvie, who had surveyed Macedonia during its wartime Allied occupation, regarded Athos with its famous "zonal arrangement of vegetation" as one of the last remnants of an extensive Mediterranean coniferous forest once supposedly covering the higher parts of the whole Macedonian region. "This vegetation under the combined attacks of man and his flocks and the action of erosion underwent a gradual change," he concluded. It was a common idea that the whole Mediterranean region had suffered the same fate. As Alfred Grove and Oliver Rackham have recently argued, the "ruined landscape theory" first surfaced from the contrast between the idyllic green settings employed by European Renaissance and baroque painters who had never ventured farther than Rome, and the site experience of the first eighteenth-century Grand Tourists to desolated Greece. The catastrophic effects caused by the introduction of grazing animals in newly discovered remote South Atlantic islands such as Saint Helena provided further "empirical" evidence. After all, it was easy to suppose that in the distant past the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean had suffered a fate analogous to that suffered in the recent past by these fragile oceanic islands.[41]

The same theory led Sir Arthur Hill, director of Kew Gardens, and W. B. Turrill, keeper of Kew's Herbarium and Library, to the Holy Mountain in the spring of 1934. The two botanists saw in Mount Athos a perfect counterexample to Saint Helena. They defined it as "a very typical and permanent area of

exclosure." The laws of the monastic republic, Turrill observed, ordained that "no female animals shall be allowed on the territory. This law is strictly kept so far as the domestic mammalian herbivorous fauna is concerned. There are numerous hares . . . some wild deer and wild pigs in the forests. These, however, are insufficient to affect the vegetation to any appreciable extent."[42]

Despite its typically Mediterranean gardens, olive groves, and meadowland around the monastic complexes, by far the greater part of the peninsula was covered with "primitive" natural vegetation. For the two British botanists, this resembled much of preglacial Europe's plant covering. "Primitiveness" was an attractive concept in the early twentieth century. Constructed in the Western geographical imagination as "the home to 'wild' and 'primitive' cultures and natures," the Balkans appealed not only to anthropologists and art historians in search of the cradle of civilization (before its translation to Central Asia), but also to an increasing number of ecologists. Between 1912 and 1916, for example, the Greek-British ecologist Marietta Pallis spent extensive periods of time researching the floating fen of the delta of the Danube, which was for her "some of the world's most natural primitive vegetation."[43]

While considering himself a "professional plant taxonomist," by the late 1930s Turrill had also carried out a certain amount of research in the emerging field of ecology. First introduced in 1935 by Alfred George Tansley, the term "ecosystem" designated a "holistic and integrative ecological concept that combined living organisms and physical environment into a system." This concept had a very strong impact on the natural sciences. In 1951, Turrill was the first taxonomist to become president of the British Ecological Society, which had been founded in 1913 by Tansley himself. Turrill appropriated the ecological concepts introduced by Tansley to achieve a dynamic approach to taxonomy. Through the charting of the distribution and range of taxa within a specific group via field observation and statistics, Turrill was able to obtain valuable information: on the place of origin, on the migration and on the history of range changes of the group as a whole and the taxa within it. While anthropologists were busy charting the cradle of civilization, Turrill speculated on Balkan plant migrations and their possible place of origin.[44]

Blurring the boundaries between anthropology and ecology, Turrill, Tansley, and other ecologists considered the Balkan region, with its "cosmopolitan" species, as a unique phytogeographical bridge between Europe and Asia. "Seat of great classical cultures," Europe's powder keg was also a "center of species making and dispersal."[45] Like the art historians Josef Strzygowski and Robert

Byron, Turrill, nevertheless, hypothesized that the true cradle was farther east: similar to groups of people, Balkan plants owed a great deal to their immigration from Asia Minor. "Crossing ecological fields with battlefields," thick black arrows on Turrill's plant migration maps more resembled military maneuvers than innocuous vegetal movements.[46]

Naturally delimited by its coastline and separated from the mainland by Xerxes' Canal, Mount Athos constituted one of these "neutral" botanical territorial units. The peninsula was, in turn, divided into altitudinal zones. Unlike Grisebach's "physiognomic belts," Turrill's zones were ecologically delimited. Grisebach's belts were static. His forest regions were immutable like those frozen by Humboldt's illustrations. Turrill's microhabitats, by contrast, were fluid and more complex entities. They were microhabitats influenced by two-way vertical migrations. The aquatic and marsh plants zone formed by the ponds along the line of Xerxes' Canal was a microcosm in itself, whereas the sea and coast zone was different from that of "streams."[47]

Despite its internal complexity, Athos was overall a "stable" mountain flora with old endemics, unique within the Mediterranean's "thousands of square miles of deforested hill slopes over-grazed by sheep and goats in periodic transhumance." If ecological virtue was to be found in the status quo rather than in change, in "tolerant" rather than "aggressive" species, then Athos represented an ideal site for what Pallis called "benign ecology." In the 1930s, taxonomists described the peninsula's vegetation in idyllic terms. For Turrill and Hill, "botanical Athos" conflated scientific and biblical imageries. The Kew Gardens' director defined the peninsula as "a plant sanctuary, a unique botanical paradise where the works of God in Nature may also be fully appreciated and studied." In the field, religious and aesthetic sensibilities were intertwined with scientific practice. While Turrill collected samples of soil for chemical analysis, Hill enjoyed the many sacred botanical treasures, such as "a fine pale-yellow mullein, branched like a candelabrum." Among precious manuscripts, ancient icons, and sacred relics, the two botanists were shown by the monks "a piece of [the] burning bush" and the "old vine of Saint Simon" at Hilandar.[48]

At their arrival in Karyés, Turrill and Hill were introduced to "'the Botanist' par excellence, the Herbalist Monk, who wanders over the peninsula collecting plants of real and supposed medicinal value—a truly remarkable man with a considerable knowledge of plants and their properties." Having learned about Hill and Turrill's visit, the monk undertook a six-hour journey across the peninsula to call on them, "no doubt to see whom it might be who was trespassing on his preserves." As opposed to Hill and Turrill's study, that of the monk was a purely "practical science." As Hill ironically remarked, "when he found we were collecting plants most of which he considered worthless, his estimation of us, I fear considerably diminished."[49]

The monks at the Holy Council in Karyés displayed great curiosity about the two British botanists' mission: "the collection of plants merely as botanical specimens seemed to them, as to the Herbalist, a somewhat futile pursuit, possibly more suited as a pastime for females than for the serious occupation of the sterner sex," Hill observed. On the other hand, the figure of the Herbalist Monk and his fieldwork practices compelled the two British botanists. He was an exotic object of Orientalist curiosity:[50]

> It was of interest to see him at work. Sometimes he traveled on foot, and, like other monks, covered the ground with astonishing rapidity, while sometimes for longer journeys he rode a mule. He was, of course, fully gowned in his black cassock with his black cylindrical hat, and on his back he carried a large and bulky bag. This contained his "Flora," which was no less than four manuscript folio volumes of Dioscorides, copied possibly by his own hand. A somewhat voluminous work for identifying one's plants "in the field." . . . On being asked the name of a plant unfamiliar to us he at once opened his bag and produced his Dioscorides, and hastily turning over the pages of the bulky volumes pointed out his identification. This was quite a remarkable feat considering the nature of the work and the condition of the manuscript.[51]

To the eyes of Turrill and Hill, the picturesque Herbalist Monk and his Dioscorides manuscript were an integrating part of that curious Edenic microcosm, with its ancient ecclesiastical and botanical treasures. For them, the Herbalist Monk featured not simply as a guardian of these treasures, but also as a marker of Athos's different temporality; of its isolation from the surrounding "powder keg." The curious figure of the monk emblematized Athos as the fossilized fragment of Byzantium envisaged by contemporary travelers. Paradoxically, however, his practical knowledge questioned the value and presumed universality of the Linnaean project and of modern science making in general. It showed its self-referentiality. What was the use of gathering plants that could not serve medical purposes? What was the purpose of accumulating encyclopedic knowledge just for its own sake?

Hill and Turrill had the opportunity to compare not only their scientific

field practices with local ones, but also their "lab spaces" with the Athonite. At Xenophontos, the two visited the monastery's "beautiful little pharmacy, adorned with a skull and cross-bones, and fitted all round the walls [with] old cupboards with good cornices painted pale blue and white." As compared with the aseptic space of Kew's Herbarium, with its millions of "collectings of dried specimens mounted on sheets and filed in cabinets in systematic order," the monastic pharmacy assumed a picturesque look. The pharmacy's shelves hosted an array of drug pots and antique bottles decorated with designs in blue and yellow. To Hill, they appeared as "objects of much beauty" very different from the standardized glass-topped boxes of the Kew carpological collection.[52]

Like the dusty libraries and dark cellars described by the British bibliomaniac Robert Curzon (and by the Herbalist Monk), the pharmacy was an ideal space for exoticizing Athos. Resembling a sixteenth-century cabinet of curiosities or a medieval workshop, Xenophontos's pharmacy was a place that belonged to a remote past, to the world of alchemy and natural wonders. It was a curious place in which, Hill wrote, "one could have browsed for some hours with pleasure, and also with profit, in studying the old labels and alchemical signs, aided by the picturesque monk in charge, who looked after the health of the brethren." In this alchemical environment, mysterious experiments were rumored to take place. The Herbalist Monk was said to have discovered "a plant from which a decoction can be prepared that will change the color of the pigment of one's skin—in fact, you can become any color you may wish." Reported by Hill in *Blackwood's Magazine,* a periodical intended for the general public, this and similar stories contributed to the shaping of scientific Athos as an exotic otherness in the British popular geographical imagination, no less than nineteenth-century accounts on "erudite Athos." The boundaries between academic and popular science, between "serious" scientific fieldwork and picturesque fiction were once again blurred.[53]

Hill and Turrill returned from their expedition to Mount Athos with a collection of five hundred specimens. These were brought to the Kew Herbarium for identification. Duly mounted and processed with a mixture of mercuric chloride and carbolic acid, the new specimens were sorted and inserted into their proper covers in the permanent collection. Hill and Turrill's floristic booty complemented the historical collections of the great Athos botanical explorers: Sibthorp, Tozer, Pichler, and even Dawkins, the Oxford Byzantine history professor. All these scholars contributed to Athos's great taxonomic adventure, whether through an antiquarian approach or through a modern

ecological one. A two-way stream of names and references had flown from the Holy Mountain to London (and vice versa) during this hundred-year labeling enterprise. Through plant naming, the great botanical pioneers attached their memory to Athonite ground; *Ebenus sibthorpii, Sedum grisebachii,* and *Alyssum orphanidis* were only some of the floristic records available from Athos's field archive. As dried specimens of *Campanula rupestris* subs. *Andrewsii* var. *lavrensis, Centaurea sanctae-annae, Astragalus monachorum,* or *Armeria sancta* made their way to London, monasteries, monks, and Athos itself exited the peninsula, bringing a touch of sacredness to the Herbarium's drawers. Not only did endemics' denominations communicate to botanists their place of origin, they acted as effective reminders of their sacred provenance.[54]

Sociological Athos

In 1934, the same year Hill and Turrill were researching Athos's plant communities, the first sociological study of the monastic community was being published. While entire generations of natural scientists had envisioned the peninsula as a large botanical garden or ecological laboratory, Michael Choukas, a new assistant professor of sociology at Columbia University, found it just as easy to turn Athos into a *human* laboratory. Having spent a summer conducting fieldwork on the Holy Mountain, Choukas completed his doctoral dissertation, which was published in the same year as a monograph entitled *Black Angels of Athos.*[55]

Like the study of plant communities, that of human communities was witnessing significant developments in those years, especially in the United States. American sociology had started to emerge as a self-conscious discipline in the last decade of the nineteenth century out of reformist interests. Systematic rational and empirical study characterized American sociology for the following decades, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the years of Choukas's academic formation and early achievements.[56]

At this time, the discipline was rapidly expanding in colleges and universities, and the fieldwork-oriented studies of sociologists from the University of Chicago were becoming increasingly influential. Scholars like Robert E. Park (1864–1944), inspired by the Darwinian notion of the web of life, developed a Chicago-based school of ethnography and human ecology. Chicago sociologists were fascinated by the variety of different urban lifestyles and ethnic group relations that could be observed just a few blocks outside of their department.

They envisaged Chicago, the "Hog Butcher for the World," with its mosaic of recent immigrant groups as their social laboratory.[57]

Similarly, Choukas envisaged Mount Athos as the perfect arena for fieldwork practice, and thus as the ideal place from which to start to build up his career. "A miniature, independent, compact world," Athos offered itself as "an ideal unit of study to sociology," the Greek American sociologist argued. Athonite society presented him with rather a "simple structure," "limited and interrelated life activities," and a "single and well-defined philosophy of life." In its geographical, political, and social circumscription, Athos was "more easily submitted to sociological investigation and scrutiny than . . . the much broader, more incoherent, more variegated outside world. It is a commonplace among social scientists to bewail the lack of social laboratories. The monks of Athos have unwittingly been building one for the last thousand years," Choukas wrote. Unlike most societies, Athos's had well-defined geographical boundaries. Furthermore, as a "mutilated social order" from which women were unnaturally excluded, its human community presented a high degree of institutional coordination and a more restricted range of variables.[58]

As a coherent, "living, systematic entity," Choukas's Athonite social laboratory was by no means closed, but instead completely dependent on the outer world. Unlike Hill and Turrill's endemics, Athos's human population was not biologically self-generating: all its recruits inevitably came from the outer modern world. If for natural scientists endemism and isolation constituted the main causes for Athos's attractiveness, Choukas's focus was on Athos's interactions with the outside world, and the consequent impact of modernity on the peninsula. Echoing the conceptualization of Athos as a fossil, which was typical of the period, Choukas's advisor Robert Morrison MacIver commented in the preface to his 1934 doctoral dissertation:[59]

> Preserved against *vital change* by the salt of ancient religious tradition, there exist within the modern world various communities which still live the authentic life of *dead centuries.* Of such none is more remarkable, more continuous, and richer in sociological interest than the celibate medieval community of Mount Athos. Its millennial resistance to the forces of changing civilizations has led various writers to give an account of it, but no study has heretofore been made which attempts a sociological analysis of its organization and of the forces at work within it.[60]

These forces were understood by Choukas within a bipolar framework: (Western) modernity vs. (Eastern medieval) tradition; science vs. religious belief; progress vs. stasis; life vs. death. If Robert Byron had been able to conciliate such extremes, Choukas's scientific training prevented him from doing so: Athos was merely an anachronism destined to die under the implacable wave of modernity. If for natural and art historians, virtue was to be found in the status quo, for the modern social scientist, Athos's "maladjustment to normal progression," epitomized by the contrast between biblical dogma and scientific rationality, would eventually cause its breakdown.[61]

Beneath Athos's stable and uniform appearance, a subterranean clash was taking place between the "forces that tend to preserve the established ways of life" and those that "introduce new ways and are responsible for change." Tradition, Athos's millennial "powerful organizer and stabilizer," was being challenged by invisible "disruptive forces radiating from the outside world." The social scientist was the sole viewer and interpreter of this clash. He was the only person able to bring it to the surface, and to the attention of his fellow scholars, who were enchanted by Athos's natural and artistic beauty or distracted by its recent political vicissitudes.[62]

According to Choukas, European diplomatic interventions, as well as nineteenth-century nationalistic internal struggles, were sociologically superficial; in Braudelian terms, they were part of Athos's *histoire événementielle.* The actual *longue durée* struggle, ignored by most scholars, was "the perennial conflict between the cenobitic and idiorrhythmic philosophy and way of life." To the eyes of the social scientist, the individual himself, and not only his society, also became a crossroads for different forces. What Choukas called the "typical monk," with his "stereotyped formulae and routine," was nothing more and nothing less than the product of several factors. Reduced to a factor, religion was only one of the many variables driving a young man from "our civilized modern communities" to a "replica of pre-scientific culture."[63]

Beyond the Athos of appearances, Choukas thus envisioned an Athos of invisible forces and hidden factors; an Athos somehow analogous to Grisebach's geological cross-sections. "About five thousand black-garbed monks haunt the mountain today," he wrote; "Five thousand black garbs, reinforced by the long hair and beards and the grave faces of their possessors, give the casual visitor the impression of homogeneity, stability, and order. To the investigator, however, who is not satisfied with the superficial appearance of things, and who

scratches beneath the surface in search of what we call reality, the first impression evaporates as the true facts emerge."[64]

As stated in the preface, Choukas's investigation aimed "to discover truth." Like Émile Durkheim, Choukas was after "the truth of modern science," an absolute truth starkly opposed to religious and lay belief. Such "truth" was not accessible to everyone, but only to those able to pierce the veil of appearances through rigorous scientific investigation.[65]

In order to achieve truth, not only did the social scientist need to be "disciplined in the spirit (or habit) of science and objectivity," but he had to establish a close, and yet detached, contact with the studied population. This was, once again, possible through fieldwork. But ethnographic fieldwork was far more problematic than that of the natural scientist. If sociological truth lay behind the mask (that is, the same way that geological strata and processes lay below the earth's surface), for the sociologist this mask could be pierced only through his own masking.[66]

Unlike Hill and Turrill, Choukas had to work incognito. He had been informed in advance about the monks' diffident attitude by persons who had lived on Athos and were familiar with its reality. He knew that questions taken from contemporary life, unlike religious, artistic, or historical ones, "remain unanswered if the investigator is seen with paper and pencil," and that "even taking pictures of the monks at work is not a fruitful enterprise unless the photographer remains unobserved." Echoing Themos Kornaros's belief that to see Athos's true scandals "one must assume a mask . . . else he shall see only smiles, prostrations, praying monks, and 'holy' relics," during his summer on Athos Choukas disguised himself now as a tourist, now as a famous American theologian, now as a doctor. Generally speaking, he was "compelled at different times to play the part of the interpreter; arbitrator and wine-connoisseur . . . assistant to the chief of police during the latter's pursuit of a Greek-American who had passed some counterfeit money to some monks; and confessor to a number of younger monks who had been maltreated by their elders." As McIver remarked, "Greek by origin and competent in the language," but also "sociologically trained" in the United States, Choukas was a perfect participant observer:[67]

> The monks did not learn of my mission during my stay on Athos. And thus, I was able to devote much of my time to mingling with the monks and lay workmen—observing and recording their activities and beliefs. . . . I ate and worked with the workmen in their humble quarters within the shadow of the monasterial walls; with coenobitic monks in their refectories, and idiorrhythmic in their private cells. I followed them all in their daily activities; in the gardens, the shore, the church, the kitchens, and the refectories. I lent a willing ear and open mind to timid or vociferous complaints, to monstrous miracle stories, to conscientious yet preposterous opinions on matters of life in general, to gossip and scandal.[68]

At Kōnstamonitou, one of the superiors believed that the masked Greek American sociologist evinced "all the characteristics of a prospective neophyte"—an excellent opportunity for Choukas to "penetrate into some of the inner and covert phases of monastic life on the mountain" by means of close interviewing. The dream of every social scientist had materialized under his own eyes: "for a whole day the leading monks of the monastery came in and out of my cell overjoyed to answer questions I asked them meekly and carefully." Choukas's purpose was "to establish as close a contact with the monks and laymen of the Athonite peninsula as possible. For it was through intimate contact with them that [he] was hoping to tap the sources from which information on the inner as well as the outer aspects of Athonite life could be obtained."[69]

The ability to speak Greek constituted one of the most powerful instruments in the hands of the social scientist; and Choukas was aware that "a monk may forget his calling . . . while talking with another monk or visitor on matters pertaining to the social level." Such was the case, he argued, especially "if the visitor speaks his language and belongs to the same nationality as the monk, in which case all the defence mechanisms of the monastic mind are in a passive state of dormancy." Choukas's Greek American status therefore allowed him intense personal engagement with his informants and detached scientific analysis—a combination that was surely envied by most of his colleagues.[70]

Once his data had been obtained in the field, Choukas had to face the "rhetorical problem of convincing readers that the facts he was putting before them were objectively acquired, and not subjective creations."[71] He needed to sustain his role as Athos's qualified interpreter to American society, as a truth seeker. This anxiety was expressed in his continuous shifting between the first person singular and the first person plural. The former was used while referring to personal experiences and interviews; the latter when making theoretical or general statements.[72]

Choukas wrote in the name of American social science, and possibly Western

science, or even human rationality itself. He suddenly assumed a distance from the informants with whom he had worked, eaten, and joked in the field while wearing his many masks. In the book, he often characterized the monks as "our opponents." In the process of translation/truth-making, other rhetorical devices were at Choukas's disposal: from the classical use of documentary materials, such as direct quotations from the informants (accompanied by their personal names), or photographs of different aspects of Athonite everyday life, to the inclusion of statistical data.[73]

As with Hill and Turrill's Athos accounts, Choukas's sociological study transcended the boundaries of academia and the social sciences. Choukas's *Black Angels of Athos* was received with enthusiasm by the American public. Besides receiving the praises of other sociologists, who were probably more fascinated by the idea of "studying a community in the laboratory" than by the exotic itself, the book was highly appreciated by eccentric travelers to Athos, such as Richard Halliburton. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, Choukas's work was greeted far less amicably. Criticizing "that pseudo-scientific, semi-psychological jargon in which it is now the fashion to bury the fruits of most research," Robert Byron ironically commented: "it might be trite to remark that humanity is lucky in its differences; but when an American professor of sociology writes a book about the Holy Mountain, it is only a polite way of wishing him 'a public.' One can imagine a converse work entitled *Black Devils of Broadway* and written by an Athonite monk to deplore the decay of American civilization in terms of liturgical practice."[74]

For a man who savored Byzantine Athos as few others did, and envisioned the origins of Western painting in Byzantine icons, it was hard to accept the social scientist's iconoclasm and the gloomy forebodings with which he concluded the book—that is, his assumption that Athos was to die soon. Robert Byron did not access the Holy Mountain by scratching, or piercing iconic Athos, but rather through its full appreciation. To him, icons, monks, and Athos itself served as gateways to the origins of Western painting and civilization. For the American sociologist, on the contrary, iconic Athos concealed a crude world of scandals, power relationships, and Darwinian struggles; it also concealed an innate determinism embedded in the sociologist's mind, which was paradoxically invisible to him:

> [To Choukas] it is almost inconceivable that a rationally organised monastic community should continue to exist. And that it will continue to exist much longer he roundly denies. He might be right in this; but historical analogy does not support him. . . . To Darwin, Huxley, eighty years ago, it must have seemed incredible that Catholic monasticism should much longer survive the onslaughts of rationalism; yet to-day, when rationalism is not so powerful, it is stronger than it used to be. The Levant at the present is undergoing the same rationalist phase; while the United States, academically, have never emerged from it; hence Mr. Choukas' forebodings.[75]

Seventy years later, Choukas's forebodings have proved wrong. True, between the 1930s and the mid-1970s the number of new recruits progressively dropped under the push of secularism, and in 1963, the year of the millennial anniversary of the foundation of Saint Athanasius's Great Lavra, Mount Athos seemed destined to perish. But, as Graham Speake observes, "the spiritual traditions of Athos are extremely resilient," and the influx of new recruits never dried completely. In the decade from 1977 to 1986, Athos saw the arrival of 284 new monks, and from 1987 to 1996 of no fewer than 609. Over the past decade, the trend has been growing exponentially. The opening of former Communist countries has contributed to this increase. Crumbling towers and derelict buildings have been restored to their original beauty. In several cases, the work has been undertaken by the monks themselves, in direct imitation of Saint Athanasius. All the monasteries have reverted to the old coenobitic rule and have reinforced their role as spiritual beacons for the outside world. Some of them have even constructed female *metóchia,* or dependencies outside of the peninsula in which women can live Athonite liturgical life.[76]

Athos's survival and revival have depended on its ability to control external forces (by regulating and discouraging secular tourism, for example) and to preserve its *longue durée* temporality. In other words, Athos has survived thanks to its ability to remain an island. As Speake comments:

> The monks succeeded in fending off the attacks of ill-informed politicians who saw the Mountain as a cheap way of boosting the country's tourist industry. They resisted suggestions that they needed reform—that they should become more ecumenically minded, that they should adopt European time, that they should do something about their economy, sell off their treasures, invest more heavily in timber industry, build proper roads, even admit women. Athos needed none of these things. And more to the point, Athos was once again responding to a need that clearly existed, a

need for a radical alternative to the fast-growing, fast-moving secularization of modern society in the outside world.[77]

Choukas, who passed away in 1987 after a long career as a propaganda expert, would be certainly surprised if he visited Athos today. And Robert Byron would be probably pleased to find that spirituality eventually prevailed over Western scientific rationalism and cynical predetermination. The art historian's iconophilia seems to have won over the social scientist's iconoclasm.

EPILOGUE

During my visit to the tower of Ouranoupoli in the summer of 2003, Mount Athos was making headlines in the international press. The European Parliament had just passed a resolution of fundamental rights in the EU, calling for the second time that year for the Greek government to proceed with the lifting of Athos's *ávaton*, the entry ban of women, on the grounds of gender discrimination. According to some Euro-deputies and the Greek Socialist Anna Karamanou, one of the most vocal opponents of the ban, the denial of access to a portion of territory located in Greece, an EU member since 1981, represented a symbolic breach to the antidiscrimination legislation.

For their part, Karamanou's opponents considered a possible lifting of the *ávaton* a serious contravention to the right to religious freedom, the right, as defined by the United Nations, to "manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance" and protected by the articles 13 and 17 of Hellenic Constitution, as well as in a series of international treaties ratified by the Greek state. Iōannēs Konidarēs, secretary general at the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, argued that "the Mount Athos *ávaton* is principally a manifestation of religious freedom, and in particular of the exercise of worship. The prohibition of entry against persons of the opposite sex is a matter of religious conscience for the monks dwelling on the Holy Mountain and should be respected as such." The lifting of the ban, Karamanou's opponents feared, would reduce "the buildings and fabulously decorated churches . . . [to]

nothing more than a shell without the spiritual atmosphere that the monks seek to achieve through celibacy."[1]

Beside legal justifications resting on Athos's special status and on the right to own property (since the peninsula belongs to the monasteries and thus to the monastic community as a whole), tradition was often called into cause by the defenders of the Athos *ávaton.* In vigor since the tenth century, the ban has been in force on Mount Athos "according to the ancient customary and holy traditions of the area, absolutely respected by monks and laymen as a rule of customary law." The ban on women was only impliedly stated on *typikà* and imperial chrysobulls, as in Byzantine times "virtually no woman ever dreamed of attempting to enter the sacred peninsula."[2]

Testimonies of women visiting Athos represent the exceptions that prove the rule. The first documented violation of the *ávaton* occurred about 1100 with the influx of several hundreds Vlach nomadic herders with their families, seeking for good pasturelands. The second (and most famous) documented infringement involved Queen Jelena, wife of the Serbian tsar and great Athos benefactor Stefan Dušan, as she accompanied her son and husband to the Holy Mountain for several months in 1347 and 1348, probably seeking refuge from the Black Death ravaging the Balkans at that time. Chronicles report monks laying carpets under the queen's feet in order to prevent her direct contact with Athos's holy ground.[3]

Other stories involving queens range from legend, such as Galla Placidia's (AD 390–450) visit to Vatopedi (a chronological impossibility) and her consequent admonition by an icon of the Mother of God, to modern oral accounts, like that of Queen Elizabeth of Romania (1843–1916), whose country

> had contributed so generously to the support of the monks that she was given a special permit to land on the shore and approach the front door of one of the largest monasteries. . . . The door was to be left open in order that she might look inside the sacred courtyard without entering. All went well, up to a certain point. The Queen gazed for several moments into the forbidden area. Then, to the horror of the assembled monks, she suddenly walked resolutely into the courtyard, straight toward the entrance of the church itself.[4]

Modern tales of infringements are not limited to queens. In the mid-nineteenth century, according to Edward Lear, the wife of the British ambassador Stratford Canning and her daughters repeatedly crossed the borders, and Lady

Somers, another friend of the English painter and a famous beauty, was said to have accompanied a party to Athos, living for two months in a tent. A few more such visits, Lear sarcastically speculated, "would bust, or go far to bust the Greek monasticism, I think."[5]

In the 1924 Charter of Mount Athos, effective since 1926 through its ratification by the Greek state, the entry of females in the Athos peninsula was legally forbidden "according to the ancient custom," though without penal sanctions. Physical deportation from Athos's territory was the only prescribed measure. In the following years, stories about women started to proliferate in the writings of eccentric travelers to Athos, possibly as part of the rhetoric of the exotic very much in vogue in those years. Richard Halliburton, for example, quoted the story of two daring German wives who infringed the *ávaton* to reach their husbands, who had remained stuck on Athos because of the snow. He also mentioned the monks' disconcert at the entry of two Danish with proper passports, but of dubious sex. The legendary tale of Alice Diplarakou, Miss Europe 1930, getting stranded on the Athonite shores and causing a young monk to break his vows and abandon the Holy Mountain survived in Western travelers' accounts until the late 1950s. And so on.[6]

In 1929, Maryse Choisy, a twenty-six-year-old French journalist, maintained she had reached Athos by boat, hiding herself in a mattress and breathing through an oxygen mask. She also maintained that she had disguised herself as the male servant of an Italian colleague and spent an entire month among Athos's monasteries. In her scandal book-reportage *One Month among the Men* (a colorful forgery), Choisy argued that she wanted to "look with a woman's eye and judge with a woman's heart a republic of eight thousand males which has never been invaded by anything female." The sporting element alone, she concluded, "was enough to arouse my curiosity."[7]

More serious infringements beyond sporting or pure curiosity occurred during the tragic civil war that followed the Second World War, when twenty-five *antartínes* (Communist women-fighters) managed to venture as far as to Karyés, stripping gold facings from the Scriptures, and "dancing defiantly around the churches." Finally, in 1953, the disembarkation of several ladies during the Ninth International Congress of Byzantine Studies convened in Thessalonica led to the enforcement of the existing law through a Legislation Decree (2623/1953) sanctioning violators with a penalty of imprisonment from two months to one year, which is still in effect today.[8]

Regardless of their scope, authenticity, and historical context, all these

sparse attempts at violating the *ávaton* through the centuries represent, as I said, nothing more than exceptions that confirm the rule. Pure literary forgeries or true episodes magnified by the press, early-twentieth-century stories of women at Athos responded to a popular fictional demand for the weird and the exotic. They were often used by eccentric travelers like Halliburton to add further color to their accounts. In their own way, "women stories" also participated to the construction of Athos as a prohibited landscape of desire in Western imagination—perhaps that same prohibited landscape which troubled Euro-parliamentarians in 2003.

To Western ladies touring the Aegean on their private yachts, the Holy Mountain also remained a pure landscape of desire. The American writer Edith Wharton, the first Western woman to leave an account of Athos, described her first glimpse of the Holy Mountain from the boat in 1888 as a long-distance, yet overwhelming, almost sublime encounter:

> As we coasted along the western side of Lemnos, we caught sight of the peak of Athos rising faint and blue from the sea ahead of us. The nearer we drew the more beautiful it became, until at last its mighty wall was close before us, dark against the brilliant sky, as the sun set in a yellow blaze behind the low hills of the Sithonian promontory.[9]

As the men in the yacht went ashore to visit the monasteries, Wharton ordered steam up in her launch, and started out a voyage of discovery:

> I was determined to go as near the forbidden shores as I could. I ran in close to Iveron and tried to photograph it, but the launch rolled so that I could not steady my camera. I then ran close in under the shore in the direction of Stavroniketa, passing a picturesque square tower used as a boat-house, with a fishing-boat drawn up under its dark archway. . . . A group of monks in a cottage sat in the sunshine watching me with evident curiosity. We went in so close to the shore that they clambered hurriedly down the hill to prevent my landing. With their shocks of black hair and long woolen robes flying behind them they were a wild enough looking set to frighten any intruder anyway! . . . As we steamed on the scene increased in beauty. Here a white chapel with a cross above its tiled cupola gleams through the trees; there a boat-house guarded by a tower stands close upon the shore.[10]

Back at the yacht with her companions, Wharton's periplus continued on the other side of the peninsula. As the yacht passed by the hermit cells near

the point blowing the whistle, "a hermit appeared on each balcony with the promptitude of the cuckoos in Swiss clocks when the hour strikes." Wharton's yacht subsequently passed by skētes "more like Swiss villages than Greek monastic settlements." Then the great monasteries followed, parading one after the other: St. Paul, Dionysiou, Grēgoriou, Simonopetra, Xēropotamou, St. Panteleimon, Xenophontos, Docheiariou.[11]

About a decade after Wharton's cruise, Athos became one of the main attractions in the itinerary of the first educational cruises to Greece and Turkey organized by the French periodical *Revue Générale des Sciences Pures et Appliquées.* In advertising brochures, passengers were promised "all the great coastal monasteries *in one day.*"[12]

On the one hand, male passengers could admire the ancient wall paintings and architectural wonders of the monasteries, or get acquainted with "different typologies of monks." On the other hand, women had to content themselves with the view of the monasteries from the ship—from the sea. Both approaches to Athos were nevertheless equally ephemeral. As soon as they landed at the monasteries, men sought to capture as many details as possible with their cameras: architectural details, artistic details, human details—always picturesque details. From the ship's deck, women perceived Athos as an image, as a vision, or rather as a film unrolling before their eyes as the ship passed by the monasteries. In between the visitors and the monks was the lens of the camera. In between the non-visitors and the Holy Mountain was the sea—always a distance, a distance at once physical and ideological.[13]

Wharton and the French tourists' experiences of Athos as a landscape, or as a sequence of picturesque images, can be read as anticipations of contemporary Western perceptions of the Holy Mountain, as part of that ephemeral game that is heritage tourism. These outsiders' experiences can also be read as part of a much longer and complex history of gazing at and imagining Athos; a history in which physical distancing does not necessarily equal exclusion, and conversely, physical presence does not necessarily mean participation—a history this book has tried to recount.

According to the historian Simon Schama, "once a certain idea of a landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery." Our journey to Athos started with a physical location—a mountain-peninsula surrounded by the sea—and with

the story of Joice Nankivell Loch, a woman who lived beyond Athos's boundaries, yet felt part of the place. It now ends with detached tourists' gazes and with a plethora of landscape representations, of overlapping visions and meanings so deeply inscribed in the rock as to be inseparable from it.[14]

Place has a religious character, in the sense of the Latin verb *religare,* to bind together. It has a gathering power. It brings the social, the natural, and the cultural together and in part produces them. It draws different people and narratives together and fuses them with and through earthly matter. Like place, landscape is also a synthetic concept in that it combines a focus on the material topography of a portion of land with vision. In most definitions of landscape, however, the viewer is set outside of it. This is the primary way in which landscape differs from place: "places are very much things to be inside of." And yet, Athos has shown that the two concepts are intimately connected, indeed dependant on one another.[15]

Approached as a landscape from beyond its physical boundaries, Mount Athos has uninterruptedly endured as a vision of desire—both material and spiritual. Dinocrates was not alone in his bold visions: narcissistic Renaissance popes such as Alexander VII Chigi emulated the mythical architect with their imagination. Nineteenth-century Russian faithful also envisaged Athos as a landscape of desire from their ships' deck, on sacred cards, or through the accounts of other pilgrims. For many of them, the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy was a final step to salvation; it was a sacred icon onto which to map a spiritual path. But Athos's peak also loomed on the imaginative horizons of Edward Howell, W. B. Thomas, and dozens of other Allied refugees as the gateway to freedom—their ultimate desire.

For most of its Western and non-Western visitors, however, Athos was a landscape of desire in a different, perhaps more materialistic sense. It was an object to be conceptually (or even physically) appropriated. Sevastianov appropriated icons and other artifacts from Athos as part of a rediscovery of Russia's Orthodox origins. Robert Curzon and other bibliomaniacs appropriated precious manuscripts for their own personal delight (or that of their patrons). Enlightenment surveyors such as Guattier and Copeland sought to appropriate the mountain-peninsula itself through systematic measurement and mapping. Edward Lear, the poetical topographer, appropriated Athos by capturing it in his sketchbook and on canvass, just as nineteenth-century classicists and Orientalists, or early-twentieth-century journalists, captured it with their pen.

Other travelers, from Richard Pococke to Robert Byron, appropriated Athos with their muscles, walking through the peninsula and ascending the peak. Unlike pilgrims, none of these categories of visitors was interested in taking part in the liturgical life of the Holy Mountain. While physically present on the peninsula, they remained outsiders who gazed at Athos as an exhibition of itself, as a large-scale open-air museum, as one of those spaces for display of which modernity has always been fond. Athos was a landscape that wrapped Western visitors, but also one from which they nevertheless remained distanced—in the same way as Wharton and other Western female cruise makers.

Athos's small-scale, self-enclosed diversity, whether botanical or geological, ethnic or social, made the peninsula a great observatory for other categories of visitors. Natural and human scientists, from Belon to Choukas, envisaged the peninsula as a world in miniature, as a botanical garden, or a sociological laboratory in which to conduct their observations. Luke and other early-twentieth-century military officers similarly envisioned the peninsula as a miniaturized geopolitical observatory. If it is true that islands are spaces of desire, Athos's quasi-insular spatiality and presumed splendid isolation fulfilled the epistemological desires of many.[16]

Mount Athos's attractiveness lies not only in its peculiar spatiality, but also in its just as peculiar temporality, which its visitors have perceived as different from that of the world outside. The fifteenth-century Florentine priest Cristoforo Buondelmonti linked Athos's liturgical temporality to that of Life Eternal; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalists linked it to cultural backwardness and superstition. The contrast between the *longue-durée* temporality of the peninsula and that of the world outside has been increasingly accentuated since the end of the nineteenth century, when steamers began to regularly link the peninsula to Thessalonica, and the telegraph connected it to the rest of the world. Modernity turned Athos into a picturesque fragment of the past trapped between the layers of human history. Viereck thus envisaged the peninsula as the perfect setting for his Freudian novel. Robert Byron found the cradle of Western art in it. On Athos, Turrill and Hill discovered a Byzantine botanical practice which problematized the epistemological foundations of their own modern science. Thomas and other officers similarly discovered a small kingdom which challenged their vision of the world itself. And so on.

Many of the changes occurring on the peninsula have been often imperceptible, or hard to predict, like shifting demographic trends, or phases of decline

and revival. Others have been perceived by visitors as curious dissonances: Luke mentioned newspapers, the telegraph, and insurance agents; contemporary pilgrims are usually struck by cell phones and computers. Other changes were far more dramatic and left a visible impact on Athos's landscape, as the massive Russian buildings still testify. After all, Athos was not an island—it was a peninsula.

Like most places, Mount Athos has not only moved through time, but also through space. Both movements caused changes in meaning, if not in form. Place is "something both fixed and fleeting, something you can walk on and something you can speak, a curious and uneasy product of experience and symbol." But it is also something that can be dematerialized and rematerialized through representation; something that can be packed and moved around through photographs, maps, postcards, paintings, book illustrations, poems, travel accounts, and other landscape media, as the previous chapters have shown. It is something that can be (and is) continuously figured and reconfigured in human imagination, as Athos's coastlines on Renaissance and post-Renaissance maps.[17]

Place is anchored in and takes its force from its physicality, and yet it often stretches far beyond it. Athos's restricted accessibility has magnified the effect. As Joice and Sidney Loch observed from their tower in Ouranoupoli, "there may have been two hundred square miles of reserved territory; but so rugged was it, so impenetrable most of it, so amazing a world, that it seemed more extensive, and entered village talk a hundred times a day." Today Athos continues to stretch far beyond the tower and the village, as it has been doing for centuries. Solid as its rocky summit, it continues to persist; fluid as the waters of the Aegean, it continues to travel, challenging space and time.[18]

NOTES

Introduction

1. Sherrard, *Athos,* 23–25. The definition of Athos as "Holy Mountain" can be found in Nicephorus II Phokás's 964 chrysobull. On Byzantine holy mountains, see Talbot's excellent book chapter "Les saintes montagnes à Byzance"; and Beyer, "Der 'Heilge Berg' in der byzantinischen Literatur"; see also the *Proceedings of the Twenty-first International Congress of Byzantine Studies,* 2:218–25. Of course, remote holy mountains and mountain islands also were to be found outside of the Byzantine Empire. The most dramatic example is perhaps the steep rocky island of Skellig Michael, off the coast of County Kerry, Ireland. Its Irish Celtic monastery, which was built on the summit of the 755-foot-high rock in AD 588, is deemed to be one of the most famous but least accessible monasteries in Europe (see, for example, Horn and Rourke, *The Forgotten Hermitage of Skellig Michael*). On the legal status of Mount Athos, see Papastathis, "The Status of Mount Athos in Hellenic Public Law."

2. Farmer, *On Zion's Mountain,* 4; Vitruvius, *De architectura,* 2.1–3. On Mount of Temptation, see Matthew 4:8.

3. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 25–27. On the *áva*ton, see Konidaris, *The Mount Athos Avaton,* 14–15.

4. Johnston et al., eds., *Dictionary of Human Geography,* 582–84. On the etymologies of place and space, see Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 22–24. On the concepts of place and place-making, see, for example, Cresswell, *Place.*

5. Wylie, "Cultural Geographies in Practice," 465. For the past three decades, geographers have approached landscape through different metaphors: as a veil concealing more than it reveals; as a text or a cultural product able to unravel stories about the society that produced it; or simply as a way of seeing invented in the Renaissance with the discovery of linear perspective. In all these cases, landscape is charged with some sense of artificiality, of mediation. Place, on the contrary, usually evokes authenticity, direct, empirical access to the world. Some cultural geographers talk about place also as a texture, highlighting the weaving together of social relations, meanings, and interactions with the physical environment. On landscape as a veil and as a way of seeing,

see Cosgrove's "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea" and his influential book *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape.* On landscape as a text, see Cosgrove and Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape;* and Duncan, *The City as Text.* On place and experience, see Entrikin, *The Betweenness of Place,* 1; Relph, *Place and Placeness;* and Cresswell, *Place.* On the materiality of place, see Feld and Basso, eds., *Senses of Place.* On place as a texture and its revisitation from a critical humanistic perspective, see Adams, Hoelscher, and Till, eds., *Textures of Place.* On the tensions in the concept of landscape, see M. Rose and Wylie, "Animating Landscape," 477.

6. For a poststructuralist perspective on place and landscape, see, for example, Barnes and Duncan, *Writing Worlds.* For a critique of nature as a social construction, see Whatmore's *Hybrid Geographies* and "Materialist Returns." For a cultural history of mountains, see Marjorie Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory;* and Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind.*

7. Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 8, 36; Cresswell, *Place,* 31. On the concept of genius loci, see Norberg-Schultz, *Genius Loci.* For a critical perspective on this concept, see Loukaki, "Whose Genius Loci?"

8. See Relph, *Place and Placelessness,* 32.

9. Farmer, *On Zion's Mountain,* 6; Tuan, "Mountains, Ruins and the Sentiment of Melancholy," 30.

10. Rackham, "Our Lady's Garden," 55; Speake, *Mount Athos,* 1.

11. Byron, *The Station Athos.*

12. On islands as places of recovery, see A. Nicolson, "The Islands," 153. On cyclical time on Athos, see Larchet, "La funzione profetica del monachesimo atonita."

13. On landscape as a means for the circulation of place, see W. T. J. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power.* On circulating references, or "scientific tokens of place," see Latour, *Pandora's Hope.* On the relationship between place and landscape representations from a phenomenological perspective, see Casey, *Representing Place.*

14. Lorimer, "Cultural Geography," 87.

15. Nankivell Loch, *A Fringe of Blue,* 115; Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition.*

16. De Vries, *Blue Ribbons, Bitter Bread.*

17. Nankivell Loch, *A Fringe of Blue,* 112–13.

18. Ibid., 115.

19. Loch, *Athos,* 15.

20. Nankivell Loch, *A Fringe of Blue,* 152.

21. Ibid., 120, 153–54.

22. Ibid., 126.

23. Ibid., 225.

24. Mellou, *Taxídi stēn Ouranoúpolē kai to Aghion Oros,* 22.

25. De Vries, *Blue Ribbons, Bitter Bread,* 317–19.

26. Nankivell Loch, *A Fringe of Blue,* 238.

27. A similar story of reconversion to Orthodoxy through Mount Athos is narrated by the sociologist Kyriakos Markydēs in his *The Mountain of Silence.*

28. Tuan, *Topophilia,* 4.

29. Talbot, "Women and Mt Athos," 77–78.

30. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 151.

1. Mythical Athos

1. Tuan, *Space and Place,* 187; Warnke, *Political Landscape,* 95.

2. M. Williams, *Landscape in the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius,* 79. On Apollo, see Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 2.

3. M. Williams, *Landscape in the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius,* 82; L. Thomas, *The Book of the High Mountains,* 476.

4. On the legend of the Thessalian giants, see L. Thomas, *The Book of the High Mountains,* 477. On archaic Athos, see Kadas, *To Aghion Oros,* 9; and Mamalákēs, *To Aghion Oros (Athōs) dia mésou tōn aiōnōn,* 27.

5. The story of Dinocrates is narrated by Vitruvius in *De architectura,* 2.1–3.

6. Eliade, *Myth and Reality,* 2.

7. Sichtermann, "Mythology and Landscape," 61; Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 61. See also M. Williams, *Landscape in the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius,* 11. Good examples of descriptions of places that reflect the nature of their inhabitants can be found in Homer's *Odyssey.* Circe's island, for instance, is said to be covered by "dark woods," mysterious as the "bewitching nymph"; the land of the giant Laestrygonians is in turn characterized by "sky-scraping cliffs"; the Aeolian island is made of "sheer rock cliff shooting up from the sea to the sky"; Scylla dwells in a cave located on a rock "reaching heaven and its peak lost in a dark cloud," whereas "the sucking whirlpool of Charybdis" lives under a lower rock. In the Athos myth, the giant becomes the mountain itself. On natural features and phenomenology, see Norberg-Schultz, *Genius Loci,* 25.

8. Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods,* 9; M. Williams, *Landscape in the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius,* 80.

9. Homer, *Iliad,* 14.263; Nicandros, *Eurōpeia,* 22.8–13, in Kōnstantínou, "Athōs skiázei nōta Lēmnias voós," 24; Heracleides, *Description of Mount Pelion,* 2.9.1–6, in Muller, *Geographi Graeci Minores,* 97–110.

10. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautics,* 1.601–6.

11. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 10. Athos's shade probably reached Apollonius (and after him Plutarch, who admittedly had never been to Athos, nor to Lemnos) as a topographic legend mentioned in an iambic verse by Sophocles (495–406 BC); see Kōnstantínou, "Athōs skiázei nōta Lēmnias voós," 25. This topographic myth is paralleled by another just as improbable popular saying, according to which Athos's morning shadow would reach the island of Skiáthos (literally meaning "in the shade of Athos") located 87 miles southwest of the peninsula.

12. Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea,* 365.

13. Semple, *The Geography of the Mediterranean Region,* 587.

14. Livierátos, "Athō perimétrou metamorphōseis," 21–22; Semple, *The Geography of the Mediterranean Region,* 586, 587.

15. Vasilópoulos, "Oi archaíoi Ellēnes kai oi Rōmaíoi dia ton Athō," 193.

16. Kōnstantínou, "Athōs skiázei nōta Lēmnias voós," 34.

17. For examples of Athos on Ptolemaic maps, see Ploutóglou, "Tridaktylou Athōs Ptolemaïkós."

18. Strabo, *Geography,* 7.33, 6.33, 6.35.

19. Pattenden, "The Byzantine Early Warning System," 269; Herodotus, *History,* 10.3.

20. Polybius provides a detailed description of their complicated method of operation (see Pattenden, "The Byzantine Early Warning System," 269–71).

21. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 9.

22. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon,* 281–316.

23. For a detailed description of the system of beacons-seamarks in the northern, central, and southern Aegean, and their range of visibility, see Semple, *The Geography of the Mediterranean Region,* 586–88.

24. Pomponius Mela, *Description of the World,* 2.31.

25. Semple, *The Geography of the Mediterranean Region,* 522–23. Maybe the bronze statue was the same statue of Ζεύς Ἄθως referred to by the Alexandrian lexicographer Hesychios at the beginning of the fourth century and reported as being in a dark cave in Byzantine times (see Smyrnákēs, *To Aghion Oros,* 14; and Ioannikios, *An Athonite Gerontikon,* 219).

26. On the *Pátria,* see Theóktistos "Archaíos kósmos stē Monē Docheiaríou," 90.

27. Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods,* 100.

28. Pliny, *Natural History,* 7.35.

29. Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places,* 5.13; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium,* 10.10.1–5.

30. Strabo, *Geography,* 66; Herodotus, *History,* 7.22; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars,* 4.109. On the ancient towns of Athos, see also Mamalákēs, *To Aghion Oros Athōs dia mésou tōn aiōnōn;* and Athanasiádēs, ed., *Aghion Oros kai prōchristianikē archaiótēta,* 17. The locations of some of the ancient cities are believed to coincide with the Byzantine monasteries. The founding fathers would have recycled pagan remains as building materials. For example, the Monastery of Ivēron, located on the western shore of the peninsula, is said to have been built upon the foundations of the temple of Aphrodite, whereas Saint Athanasius would have unconsciously cast the foundations of the Great Lavra upon the temple of Artemis. It has been speculated that the name of the port of Dáphnē (meaning "laurel") derives from a shrine dedicated to Apollo in ancient times (see Theóktistos, "Archaíos kósmos stē Monē Docheiaríou," 90; Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos,* 86; Papágghelos, "To Aghion Oros ōs archaiologikós chōros"; and Papággelos and Paliompeēs, "Prōchristianikés archaiótētes ston Athō").

31. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 10; Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars.*

32. Herodotus, *History,* 6.44. The English translator uses the term "shark," but the meaning of *thērion* is rather that of monstrous creature.

33. Vasilópoulos, "Oi archaíoi Ellēnes kai oi Rōmaíoi dia ton Athō," 189.

34. Aelian, *On Animals,* 13.20. "[The year following the shipwreck, Persian generals] sailed away, with six hundred ships of war, for Ionia. From there on they did not sail their ships along the land, heading straight for the Hellespont and Thrace, but, setting out from Samos, they made their voyage through the Icarian Sea and through the islands. I think this was because they were mostly afraid of the sailing round Athos, where, in the year before, their passage had brought such terrible disaster" (Herodotus, *History,* 6.96).

35. Herodotus, *History,* 7.22–24.

36. Vitruvius, *De architectura,* 2.1–2. On the figure of Alexander, see Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 30.

37. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 43, 44.

38. Vitruvius, *De architectura,* 2.3. See also Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 402.

39. Said, *Orientalism,* 56–58, 60; della Dora, "Geostrategy and the Persistence of Antiquity."

40. Lysias, *Epitaph,* 2.28–29.

41. Isocrates, *Speeches and Letters,* 4.88–89.

42. Lucian, *Rhetorical Teachings;* Plato, *Laws,* 3; Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* 3; Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon;* Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead,* 7.414. The quote is from Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos,* 75. Herodotus recounts the following story: "[Xerxes] told those who laid on the lashes to say these words, of violent arrogance, worthy of a barbarian: 'You bitter water, our master lays this punishment because you have wronged him, though he never did you any wrong. King Xerxes will cross you whether you will or not; it is with justice that no one sacrifices to you, who are a muddy and briny river.' So he commanded that the sea be punished and ordered the beheading of the supervisors of the building of the bridge" (*Historia,* 7.35).

43. Philo, *On Dreams,* 2.117–23.

44. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos,* 75.

45. Plutarch, *Moralia,* 335.17–20; Lucian, *Essays in Portraiture,* 4.9 and *How to Write History,* 7.12; MacLeod, *Lucian: A Selection,* 5.

46. Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead,* 6.1–14.

47. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* 6.36.

48. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 50.

49. Juvenal, *Satira,* 62.5; Ovid, *Metamorphosis,* 2.216–17; Catullus, *Carmina,* 66.42–47. For a commentary on Athos in these authors, see Vasilópoulos, "Oi archaíoi Ellēnes kai oi Rōmaíoi dia ton Athō," 198.

50. Virgil, *Georgics,* 1.327–33.

51. Sargeaunt and Fletcher-Royds, *Virgil's Georgics,* 6; Jenkyns, *Virgil's Experience,* 343; della Corte, *Le Georgiche di Virgilio commentate e tradotte,* 10.

52. Virgil, *Aeneid,* 12.697–703.

53. MacEwen, *Vitruvius,* 1; Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory,* 4; Cosgrove, "Ptolemy and Vitruvius," 22.

54. Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory,* 42, 53.

55. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria,* 6.4. On Ghilberti's attitude toward the myth, see Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 404.

56. Weller, *Francesco di Giorgio,* 270; Fiore, *Città e macchine del '400,* 69; MacEwen, *Vitruvius,* 101, 127.

57. MacEwen, *Vitruvius,* 187; Martini, *Trattati,* 87.

58. Martini, *Trattati,* i, 10.

59. Ibid., iii, 17–19 (my translation). Pico della Mirandola is quoted in Cosgrove, *Ptolemy and Vitruvius,* 22.

60. Brinton, *Francesco di Giorgio Martini of Siena,* 40, 44, 94; Fiore, *Città e macchine del '400,* 30. On the creative reuse of classical antiquity in the Renaissance, see Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country,* xx.

61. Frankfort, *To óros tou Alexándrou,* 249.

62. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 404.

63. Angelici, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e i Chigi,* 135; Metzger Habel, *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII,* 8, 307.

64. Quoted in Metzger Habel, *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII,* 8.

65. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 159–60.

66. Krautheimer, *Roma Alessandrina,* 1, 31, 32.

67. Ibid., 13.

68. Metzger Habel, *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII,* 8.

69. Ibid., 310.

70. Prosperi, *Pietro da Cortona e il disegno,* 61; Metzger Habel, *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII,* 302, 311.

71. Frankfort, "To 'óros tou Alexándrou,'" 349; della Dora, "Alexander the Great's Mountain," 504.

72. My translation. About this image, see Davis, *The Drawings of Ciro Ferri,* 8.

73. The figure of Alexander entered the Western Renaissance imagination through Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (written four centuries after Alexander's death), where the Macedonian king is depicted with great admiration, and through Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Life of Alexander of Macedon,* a historical romance written probably about AD 300, combining fact and fancy (see Hazelton Haight, *The Life of Alexander the Macedon by Pseudo-Callistenes,* 2–3; and Hadjinicolaos, "The Disputes about Alexander and His Glorification in the Visual Arts," 17–18). On the significance of Alexander the Great's conquests in Western cosmopolitan discourses, see Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 44.

74. See Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps;* Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 159–65; and Enggass, "La chiesa trionfante e l'affresco della volta del Gesù."

75. Pietro Cara quoted in Hadjinicolaos, "The Disputes about Alexander and His Glorification in the Visual Arts," 18, emphasis added.

76. Enggass, "La chiesa trionfante e l'affresco della volta del Gesù," 30.

77. Frankfort, "To 'óros tou Alexándrou,'" 250; Hadjinicolaos, "Giovanni Battista Gaulli," 252.

78. Frankfort, "To 'óros tou Alexándrou.'"

79. Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic,* 218; Saavedra Fajardo quoted in Warnke, *Political Landscape,* 91.

80. On French and British painters' misreading of Greek landscapes, see Lowenthal, "Classical Antiquities as National and Global Heritage," 730.

81. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 405; Mainardi, *The End of the Salon,* 12; Godwleska, *Geography Unbound,* 278.

82. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 14. See also Warnke, *Political Landscape,* 93, 98.

83. Abbott, *Xerxes,* 83–84.

84. Abbott, *Alexander the Great,* 5.

85. Weber, *A Bibliography of Jacob Abbott,* 11.

86. Abbott, *The Teacher.* This book was reprinted in 2007 by BiblioBazaar. On nature as a source of moral values in nineteenth-century America, see Schama, *Landscape and Memory;* Casey, *Representing Place,* 57; and Schuyler, "The Sanctified Landscape," 97.

87. Karassava, "Alexander the Great"; Alexandros Foundation, "Alexander the Great Mountain." On the Alexander Mountain project and its antecedents back to the 1850s, see Hamilakis, *A Nation and Its Ruins.*

88. Tzimas, "Mount Rushmore, Greek Style?"; Alexandros Foundation, "Alexander the Great Mountain."

89. Tzimas, "Mount Rushmore, Greek Style?"

90. Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image,* 5. See also Theóktistos, "Archaíos kósmos stē Monē Docheiaríou."

2. Utopian Athos

1. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind.* On Eden, see Scafi, *Mapping Paradise.*

2. Lowenthal, "Islands, Lovers, and Others," 208.

3. Islands have been privileged "floating spaces" in the Western geographical imagination. For a cultural review, see ibid.

4. Papachryssánthou, *Actes du Protáton,* 5–10.

5. Ibid., 18.

6. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 38–39. The first ban on domestic animals was ordered by Basil I the Macedon in 883: "μηδὲ . . . εἰσέρχεσθαι τινὰς, μήτε ποιμένας μετὰ τῶν ποιμνίων αὐτῶν μήτε βουκόλους μετὰ τῶν βουκολίων αὐτῶν μήτε ἁπλῶς κτήνη τὰ οἱαδήποτε" (no one shall enter [Athos], neither shepherds with their flocks, nor herders with their cows, nor any animal) (Papachryssánthou, *Actes du Protáton,* 1:16–17). In his *Typikón,* Saint Athanasius prohibits domestic animals: "περὶ δὲ προβάτων ἢ αἰγῶν περιττὸν ᾠήθην σημᾶναι ὡς πάντῃ ἀνοίκειον μοναχοῖς καὶ μάλιστα ἐν ὄρεσι καθεζομένοις" (as to the sheep and the goats, it is not right that the monks and those who are in the mountains [the hermits] own them) (121:19–20). In Monomáchos's *typikón* (1045), the ban is once again enforced, and only cattle are allowed for ploughing the fields. In the second half of the eleventh century, Vlach herders often trespassed the boundary of Athos with their flocks, but were chased out after an ordinance issued by Emperor Alexios Komnēnós at the end of the century. The *typikón* of Manuel Palaiológos (1046) generally forbids the entry of animals, especially female animals "μηδέποτε εὑρεθῆναι θῆλυ ζῷον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους ἐντὸς" (no female animal shall be found inside of Athos) (Papachryssánthou, *Actes du Protáton,* 13:72). During the Turkish rule, the monasteries often used to forage (male) oxens and goats on their territories and sell them out of the peninsula. The Constitutional Charter of 1924 (still in force today) generally forbids female animals on Athos. Exceptions, however, occurred during the Civil War (1948–50), when herders and their flocks sought protection on the peninsula, but they

were removed two years later. The breeding of oxens was completely forbidden in 1978. Today (male) horses and mules are the only large domestic animals to be found on the Holy Mountain.

7. Quoted in Sherrard, *Athos,* 10.

8. Chrysochoïdēs, *Aghion Oros;* Burridge, "Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Monasteries on Mt. Athos and Their Architectural Development"; Ware, "St. Athanasius the Athonite."

9. Talbot, "Byzantine Monastic Horticulture," 41–45.

10. Athanasius, "*Typikón* of Athanasios the Athonite for the Lavra Monastery," 253.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 252.

13. Chrysochoïdēs, *Aghion Oros;* Ware, "St. Athanasius the Athonite," 3; Speake, *Mount Athos,* 46–47.

14. Talbot, "Byzantine Monastic Horticulture." On Athonite monks and physical labor, see J. Thomas and Constantinides Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents;* Lash, "Athos, a Working Community"; and Ware, "St. Athanasios the Athonite," 9.

15. Gregory of Nyssa, quoted in G. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought,* 40. On Eden, see Scafi, *Mapping Paradise,* 34–35.

16. Maguire, "Paradise Withrawn," 23; Maguire, "Gardens and Parks in Constantinople," 261.

17. Gilles, *Islands of the Mind,* 29; Apolytíkion tou Aghíou Antōníou, pl.4th. Eustáthios is quoted in Talbot, "Byzantine Monastic Horticulture," 52.

18. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 226. On the visit of the Mother of God to Athos, see Kadás, *Aghion Oros,* 10.

19. Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century."

20. Tsamēs, *Iōsēph Kalothétou Syggrámmata,* 22, 461.

21. Kókkinos, *Víos Aghíou Sávva,* 48–49; Thomas Mágistros, "Epistolē patrí kai philosophō Iōsēph, perí tōn en zē Italōn kai Persōn ephonō gheghenēménōn," 6.145.

22. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 73–74, 79; Tsamēs, *Iōsēph Kalothétou Syggrámmata,* 462; Mavromatēs, "To Aghion Oros katá ton 140 aiōna," 13–16; Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century," 161; Speake, *Mount Athos,* 79.

23. On the mention of Athos in Andronicus's chrysobull, see Talbot, "Les saintes montagnes à Byzance," 275. Grēgorás, *Antirrhektiká,* 1.1.1, and *Rōmaikē Istoría* 14. 7.1–4.

24. James and Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places."

25. Grēgorás in Papantōnios, *Aghion Oros,* 183.

26. Ibid., 184.

27. Quotations are from ibid., 183–85. On representations of Eden on medieval *mappae mundi,* see Scafi, *Mapping Paradise.*

28. Grēgorás in Papantōnios, *Aghion Oros,* 184–85. An earlier personification of Athos for didactic purposes can be found in *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* by the eleventh-century Byzantine polymath Michael Psellos: "Athos would be more likely to hide itself from human gaze than an emperor's deed to escape the notice of his subjects" (6.28, trans. Sewter, 169).

29. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 90–92; Gillis, *Islands of the Mind,* 42.

30. On Kaloyeros, see Allen, "Kaloyeros: An Atlantis in Microcosm?"

31. Coronelli, *Isolario dell'Atlante Veneto;* Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 93.

32. Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World;* Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 93. On the different purposes and uses of island books, see Tolias, *Ta nēsológia,* 17–21.

33. Tolias and Livierátos, "O Athōs tōn nēsiōn," 217–39; Weiss, "Un umanista antiquario: Cristoforo Buondelmonti," 105–16; Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 93. Ciriaco d'Ancona, who traveled to Athos a few decades after Buondelmonti (possibly, as Jos van der Vin and others suggest, with a copy of the *Liber* to hand), has left us a detailed description of some of these treasures (see van der Vin, *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople,* 138; and Bodnar, *Cyriac of Ancona,* 121–35).

34. Tolias, *Ta nēsológia,* 31; Tolias and Livierátos, "O Athōs tōn nēsiōn," 231.

35. The translation of Buondelmonti is from Gothóni, *Tales and Truth,* 11. For a comparison between different versions of Buondelmonti's texts, see the appendix in della Dora, "Mapping a Holy Quasi-Island."

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 11–12.

38. Tolias, *Ta nēsológia,* 30, 32–33; Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 104–5. On Martellus, see Banfi, "Two Italian Maps of the Balkan Peninsula," 27. On *loci memoriae,* see Nora, *Realms of Memory.* On *loci memoriae* and Renaissance maps, see Mangani, *Cartografia morale.*

39. Tolias and Livierátos, "O Athōs tōn nēsiōn," 227, 238.

40. On representations of Athos in different manuscript traditions of Buondelmonti's *Liber* and the representation of the gulf, see della Dora, "Mapping a Holy Quasi-Island."

41. This thesis is illustrated in Huber, "Ē nēsos Outopía kai to Aghion Oros"; and Irmscher, "Utopia = Athos?" For a parallel between Martellus's map and Holbein's map of Utopia, see Livierátos and Pazarlē, "Ou tópos ē tópos Orous?"

42. More, *Utopia;* Goodey, "Mapping 'Utopia,'" 16.

43. More, *Utopia.*

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.; Erasmus, trans., *Luciani Icaromenippus seu Hypernephelus.* See also Thompson, *The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St. Thomas More.* In particular, it has been suggested that *Utopia* was probably inspired by the *Dialogues with the Dead* and the figure of Menippus (who is described as scorning Xerxes in Hades).

46. More, *Utopia;* Livieratos and Pazarlē, "Ou tópos ē tópos Orous?" 246.

47. More, *Utopia.* On Athos's libraries, see Jeffreys, "The Libraries of Mount Athos."

48. More, *Utopia.* The lack of private property and of desire for money is common to many imaginary islands (see Manguel and Guadalupi, *Dictionary of Imaginary Places*).

49. Livierátos and Pazarlē, "Ou tópos ē tópos Orous?" 246. Brian Goodey identified

More's imaginary island-state with the British Isles and Utopia's channel with the British Channel (see Goodey, *Mapping Utopia*).

50. Livierátos and Pazarlē, "Ou tópos ē tópos Orous?" 253.

51. More, *Utopia.*

52. Bishop, "Ambrosius Holbein's Memento Mori Map for Sir Thomas More's Utopia"; Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 150; Cosgrove, "Globalism and Tolerance in Early Modern Geography," 866.

53. Tolias, *Ta nēsológia,* 30. Similarly, one and a half centuries later, the Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius included a landscape drawing of Tempe in his *Parergon* (a companion volume to his famous atlas containing maps of ancient *periploi,* such as Ulysses, Aeneas, Alexander and Jason's). Set below the slopes of Mount Olympus, the valley was described as a *locus amoenus* where the "painful students, faint and wearied in this long and wearisome journey [around the world], might recreate themselves" (Cosgrove, "Globalism and Tolerance in Early Modern Geography," 857).

54. "Da Stalimene in fin a Monte Sancto / E circha mia sesanta inuer ponente / Che Atos gia gli fu dito antiquamente / Altissimo e divoto tuto quanto / Per tuto e monasteri in ogni canto / De chaloieri pieni che sovente / Fano suo oration giemente / Pregando Idio chi cuopri col suo manto" (Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, *Isolario,* n.p.; my translation).

55. Donattini, "Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, il suo Isolario e un viaggio di Giovanni Bembo," 230; Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 93.

56. Donattini, "Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, il suo Isolario e un viaggio di Giovanni Bembo," 212, 217. The dedicatory cryptogram reads: "Al Divo Cinquecento cinque e diece / Tre cinque a do Mil nulla tre e do un cento / nulla, questa opra dar più ch'altri lecce."

57. Ibid., 235, 238.

58. Livierátos, "Athō perimétrou metamorfōseis," 78; Tolias, *Ta nēsológia,* 129–30.

59. Coronelli, *Historical and Geographical Account of the Morea.*

60. Boschini, *L'arcipelago con tutte le isole.* On Xerxes' Canal on modern maps, see Livierátos and Pazarlē, *Ou tópos ē tópos Orous?* 249–52.

3. Iconic Athos

1. Nikoláos, *Aghion Oros,* 94.

2. Hamma, *Landscapes of the Soul,* 43. On sacred space, see also Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* 25–26.

3. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes,* 128.

4. In Western sacred art, especially under the spell of modern philosophy and empirical sciences, prototypes were found in visible nature. The Eastern Church, by contrast, envisaged in the icon a sign of the uncreated. As such, the icon was not concerned with the imitation of the material world, but with its transfiguration. Condemning the iconoclasm of Protestantism, the Council of Trent (1545–63) exalted the didactic function of visual arts, but at the same time—unlike in the Second Council of Nicea (AD 787)—the mysteric value of the image was contested, arguing that "the image is a representation, not a presentation" (Zibawi, *Icone,* 12). On differences between Western and Eastern theological traditions and their translation in sacred art and perceptions of nature, see Foltz, "Nature Godly and Beautiful."

5. Kartsonis, "The Responding Icon," 58; Gheorghiu, *Apó tēn 25ē ōra stēn aiōnía ōra,* 12; Gendle, "Windows of Eternity," 231; Zibawi, *Icone,* 13.

6. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes,* 45–46, 134; Matthew 17:1–2; Exodus 19:9.

7. In Eastern iconography, mountains also serve a symbolic function. For instance, the scene of the Nativity is not a stable, as in later Western painting, but inside and around a mountain—that of the cave of the Nativity. "From a cave, You shone forth the world, into a cave You sink from the world. Then a cave was found when there was no room in the inn. And now you are lodged in another cave where You lack a tomb" goes a sermon composed by Germanos II, the thirteenth-century patriarch of Constantinople (Maguire, "The Cycle of Images in the Church," 122).

8. Matthew 4:8; on Athos as Mount of Temptation, see Reclus, *The Earth and Its Inhabitants,* 108.

9. Matthew 7:13–14; 1–5.

10. For a detailed historical and architectural description of the *arsanádes* of Mount Athos, see Athanasiádēs, ed., *Aghion Oros kai thálassa.* For the origins of this word and its use on Mount Athos, see Phountás's essay in the same volume.

11. Tolias, "Athōnitikē ierē chartographía"; Theocharis, "Church Embroidery."

12. Gothóni, *Paradise within Reach.* While venerating the icons or relics at the shrine remains the main goal of Orthodox pilgrimage, the journey to the shrine is not insignificant. It often contributes to the shaping to the experience of pilgrimage; examples are provided in Dubisch, *In a Different Place.* On the Miracle of Saint Athanasius, see Sherrard, *Athos,* 11. On the Portaitissa, see Nikódēmos Lavriōtēs, "Ē Theotókos eis to Aghion Oros dia tēs Thalássēs." *Proskynētária* were basically travel guides for Orthodox pilgrims, usually bound to the Holy Land, but later also to major monastic centers, such as the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai, Kykkos in Cyprus, and, of course, the monasteries of Athos. The *proskynētária* were initially circulating as manuscripts, and subsequently, since the seventeenth century, in printed form, often profusely illustrated with engravings and cartographic representations (see Deluga, "Mont Athos dans les gravures balcaniques des XVIIème et XIX siècles," 240).

13. Tsámēs, *Iōsēph Kalothétou Syggrámmata,* 461–62.

14. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 122.

15. Ibid., 120–21.

16. Ibid. 122–23; see also Papastathis, "The Status of Mount Athos in Hellenic Public Law," 63.

17. Contescu, "L'image du Mont-Athos dans l'exonarthex de Polovraci," 311.

18. Sugar, *South-Eastern Europe under Ottoman Rule,* 121–29.

19. This was the result of the open-door policy followed by the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia, as they tried to encourage the influx of Greek merchants, scholars, and clerics to their domains, and promote education, arts, and the press, with some

openings to Western thought (Papastrátos, *O Sinaïtēs Chatzēkyriákēs,* 31). The academies founded at the turn of the century in the Danubian principalities soon replaced Constantinople as centers of higher Greek learning (see Rapp, "Kaisarios Dapontes and Greek Intellectual Life in the Danubian Principalities of the Eighteenth Century," 2).

20. Tolias, "Athōnikē ierē chartographía," 175. The title of Komnēnós's *proskynētárion* reads: *Proskynētárion of the Holy Mountain of Athos, written and printed under the most serene rule of the most pious, illumined and highest autocrat and ruler of all Hungro-Wallachia sir sir John Constantine Bassaraba Voeovoda; dedicated to his eminence sir sir Theodosios, Metropolitan of Hungro-Wallachia, with the zeal and expenditure of the most eminent doctor sir John Komnēnos, in order to give grace to the pious [Orthodox Christians] for the salvation of their souls. Printed in the monastery of Snagov by hieromonk Anthimos from Iberia, 1701* (my translation).

21. "Who wants to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain, to see and hover it, should read the present book, and then set off" (Komnēnós, *Proskynētárion,* n.p., my translation).

22. Tsamēs, *Iōsēph Kalothétou Syggrámmata,* 461.

23. "Πάλιν ἄν θέλῃς ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, στὸν Ἄθων *ἀναβαίνεις,* / Εἰδὲ σηκῶνεσαι ταχὺ, στὴν Λαύρα *καταβαίνεις.*/ . . . *Περιπατεῖτε σύντομα,* πάτε στὴν Κερασίαν,/ Σὰν ἀναβῆτε μείνετε, νύκτα στὴν Παναγίαν./ Καί τὸ ταχὺ μ' εὐλάβειαν, *μὲ κόπον μὲ νηστείαν,*/ Τὸν Ἄθω *ἀναβαίνετε,* μὲ πλείστην προθυμίαν./ . . . Ἔπειτα *καταβαίνετε,* πάλιν στὴν Παναγίαν" (Komnēnós, *Proskynētárion,* n.p., my translation, emphasis added).

24. Komnēnós, *Proskynētárion,* 7. On the political situation of Wallachia, see Sugar, *South-Eastern Europe under Ottoman Rule,* 130.

25. Staïkos, *Ta typōména stē Viennē Ellēniká vivlía,* xxvi.

26. Theochares, "Church Embroidery"; Kadas, *To Aghion Oros,* 15; Papastratos, *Paper Icons,* 18.

27. Tolias, "Athōnikē ierē chartographía," 158.

28. See Papastratos, *Paper Icons* and *O Sinaïtēs Chatzēkyriákēs.*

29. Ignátios, *Aghíou Iōánnou tou Sinaïtou Klimax,* 128. On dalla Via, see Papastratos, *Paper Icons,* 393.

30. Papadopoulos and Ruscillo, "A Kētos in early Athens," 208.

31. Tolias, "Athōnikē ierē chartographía," 168.

32. Ibid., 162.

33. Translation in Papastratos, *Paper Icons,* 2:392.

34. The complete title reads: *Theater of the Holy Mountain of Athos. The holy and God-protected mountain of Athos in its entireness, with its holy, shining, and famous monasteries, both on the east and the west [slopes of the peninsula]. Engraved and printed for the view of the pious and celebrated emperors, and for the benefit and piety of the Orthodox Chrisitians, 1713* (my translation). On the moral function of the theater and its relationship with landscape and cartographic representations, see the following publications: Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic,* 127; Roberts, *Bruegel,* 8; Cosgrove, "Globalism and Tolerance in Early Modern Geography," 858; and Mangani, *Cartografia morale.*

35. On Constantinos and his group, see Dobjanschiet and Georgescu, *Icoane din Târgovişte secolele XVI-XIX,* 61. The *exonarthex* is the antechamber at the west end of an Orthodox church. On the role of engravings in the development of mural painting in Romania, see Deluga, "Balkan Elements in Orthodox Church Painting," 20; Blankoff, "Paysages, fonds d'architecture et petits objets dans les icônes crétoises et russes après 1453"; Constescu, "L'image du Mont-Athos dans l'exonarthex de Polovraci," 309; and Florea, *Istoria artei româneşti veche şi medievală,* 544.

36. "Hymn Akáthistos," trans. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 217, 226.

37. Nicolescu, *Moştenirea artei bizantine în România.* On Brancovan's patronage of other works of art, see Dragut, *Romanian Art,* 417; Moisescu, *Tirgovişte monumente istorice şi de ărta;* and Dobjanschi and Georgescu, *Icoane din Târgovişte secolele XVI–XIX.*

38. Dragut, *Dobrovat,* 34–37, 55, and ill. 54, 67, 68; Florea, *Istoria artei româneşti veche şi medievală,* 262; Dragut, *Romanian Art,* 267.

39. Contescu, "L'image du Mont-Athos dans l'exonarthex de Polovraci," 312. This, Contescu argues, would be the only explanation for choosing such an unusual subject for a church mural painting, infringing the canons of Byzantine art.

40. Jelavich and Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States,* 95–97.

41. Ibid.; Sugar, *South-Eastern Europe under Ottoman Rule,* 134–35.

42. Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureştilor,* 139–41; Jelavich and Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States,* 119.

43. Kitromelides, "The Enlightenment East and West," 58.

44. Today there are twelve skētes on the Holy Mountain: eight are Greek, one Russian (Prophet Elijah), two Romanian (Saint John the Forerunner and Lakkou), and one Bulgarian (Bogoroditsa).

45. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 79–81.

46. Condurachi, *Witnesses to the Romanian Presence on Mount Athos;* Smyrnákēs, *To Aghion Oros,* 421.

47. Smyrnákēs, *To Aghion Oros,* 421.

48. Ibid. *Díkaios* is the title given to the abbot of a skētē; *kyriakón* is the name given to its church.

49. The translation of Gennadios's text is from Pazaras, "General View of Mount Athos, the Foundations, Apostles, Archangels, Monks and Saints," 198.

50. Gennadios used paper icons as templates for framing illustrations like Saint George (bottom left), or Saint George of Ioannina (bottom right), one of the most represented neo-martyrs in the nineteenth century (see Papastratou, *Paper Icons,* 215). The compositional rhetoric of these representations (and of Gennadios' icon of Athos) is inherited from Byzantine *vita* icons, with the saint at the centre surrounded by scenes from his life and miracles.

51. On Renaissance maps resembling theaters, see Casey, *Representing Place,* 238.

52. The institutional hierarchical listing of the monasteries has no relationship with Gennadios's graphic arrangement. Institutionally, Athonite monasteries are ranked as follows: Great Lavra, Ivēron, Vatopedi, Hilandar, Dionisiou, Koutloumousiou,

Pantokratōros, Xēropotamou, Zōgrafou, Docheiariou, Karakalou, Philotheou, Simonopetra, Aghiou Pavlou, Stavronikēta, Xenophōntos, Grēgoriou, Esphigmenou, Aghiou Panteleimon, and Kōnstamonitou. Of course, the skētes are subordinates to the monasteries.

53. Smyrnákēs, *To Aghion Oros,* 422.

54. Ibid., 423.

55. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 146.

56. Fennell, *The Russians on Athos,* 20, 80; Speake, *Mount Athos,* 153; Smyrnákēs, *To Aghion Oros,* 705–7.

57. Fennell, *The Russians on Athos,* 41.

58. Ibid., 44–46.

59. Ibid., 155–56. It was mainly thanks to these private donations, Fennell argues, that the Russians could establish themselves on Athos. Although these were primarily directed to the Slavic monasteries (especially—and understandably—to Saint Panteleimon), even the richer Greek houses benefited, compensating for the income they had lost in their confiscated lands. For instance, it was a Russian private donation that resurrected Simonopetra in 1891.

60. Ibid., 162–63. On the goletta of the Skētē of Prophet Elijah, see Phountás and Katsáros, "To karávi tēs Pantokratōrinēs Skētēs tou Prophētē Ēlía," 185–86.

61. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes,* 101, 102.

62. Tuan, *Topophilia,* 70.

63. Fennell, *The Russians on Mount Athos,* 167.

64. Ibid. Saint John of the Ladder defines *xeniteía* as "the definitive abandonment of all the things in our country that prevent us from achieving the pious goal of our life; [it is] the separation from everything, so that the mind remains inseparable from God" (Ignátios, *Aghíou Iōánnou tou Sinaïtou Klímax,* 51, 52). See also Christaphakópoulos, *Everghetinós,* 124–33.

65. Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia," 13. See also Gibson, "Russian Imperial Expansion in Context and by Contrast," 181.

66. Fennell, *The Russians on Athos,* 68. See also Bushuiev, *Russian Travellers to the Greek World,* 15; and Speake, *Mount Athos,* 155.

67. The two founding fathers of Athos (Athanasius and Peter) are accompanied by the founders of the two main Slav monasteries, as if to suggest the role of these as the perpetuators of Orthodox tradition on Athos and elsewhere.

68. Fennell, *The Russians on Athos,* 155.

69. Spiritual *hēsychía* and salvation are often compared to a "tranquil port." A verse of the Supplicatory Canon to Our Lady Gorgoypēkoos, or Quick to Hearken (one of the most popular miraculous icons on Athos), composed by Nikódēmos the Athonite in 1792 is particularly evocative: "From sea storm and swelling waves of certain death hast thou saved them that invoked thy divine name: preserve us also from outward destruction and from the shipwreck of soul in eternal deeps, and bring us to the tranquil port of salvation, O Mother of God Most High."

70. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos,* 24–25.

71. Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia," 4.

72. Etinhof, "Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastianov and His Activity," 213. See also Fennell, "The Russians on Mount Athos," 95.

73. Etinhof, "Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastianov and His Activity," 213.

74. Ibid., 212, 214; Pazarlē and Ploutoúglou, "Athō ponēma chartōn," 286. Sevastianov visited Athos in 1851, 1852, and, more systematically, in 1856–57 and 1858.

75. Livingstone and Withers, *Geography and Enlightenment,* 4, 19.

76. On Western Enlightenment, see ibid., 8; and Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye,* 195. On Russian Enlightenment, see Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia," 5–9.

77. Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia." On Orthodoxy and Enlightenment, see Kitromelides, "The Enlightenment East and West," 55, and *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy,* vi.

4. Erudite Athos

1. Tsougarakis, *The Eve of the Greek Revival,* 1.

2. Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land,* 64. On Winkelmann's relationship with classical art, see Constantine, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal,* 110. The example of Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), probably the most influential historian of the Enlightenment, is illustrative of the centrality of Rome.

3. Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land,* 71.

4. Ibid. 89; Tsougarakis, *The Eve of the Greek Revival,* 25. See also Lowenthal, "Classical Antiquities as National and Global Heritage."

5. Silvestro, "Western European Travellers to Mainland Greece," 108.

6. The eighteenth century witnessed a massive growth in the production of books, newspapers, and other printed material (see Black, *The British Abroad,* 2). Travel books were extremely popular in the early European lending libraries, and by the nineteenth century, they had become a common good for mass consumption. Originally a useful source of information about foreign lands, travel accounts were part of popular literature by the end of the century. "Many travelers to Greece took along a draughtsman, or hired one on the way. At home these sketches and paintings of famous views would be translated into engravings to illustrate an author's text . . . and provide many hours of pleasing musings to armchair travellers" (Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land,* 20, 75).

7. T. Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition."

8. Belon, *Portraits d'oyseaux, animaux, serpens, herbes, arbres, hommes et femmes d'Arabie & Egypte,* n.p. On Pococke's skepticism, see Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods.*

9. The quote is from Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries,* 144, emphasis added. On Pococke in Greece, see Simōpoulos, *Xénoi taxidiōtes stēn Elláda.* On the history of eyewitness observation in Western travel practices, see Adler, "Origins of Sightseeing."

10. Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods,* 147.

11. Ibid., 145; Constantine, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal,* 190.

12. Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods,* 147. On eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical maps, see Godlewska, *Geography Unbound,* 163; and Black, *Maps and History,* 31.

13. Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land,* 81; Joyneville, "Introductory Note to the American Translation," vii; Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods,* 137; Simōpoulos, *Ē leilasía kai katastrophē tōn Ellēnikōn archaiotátōn,* 290–91.

14. Grell, "Les ambiguïtés du philellénisme," 224; Godlewska, *Geography Unbound,* 279.

15. Grell, "Les ambiguïtés du philellénisme," 231.

16. Tsigakou, *The Rediscovery of Greece,* 26.

17. Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods,* 155–57.

18. Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land,* 104. On Leake's visit to Athos and its motivations, see Wagstaff, "A British Spy on Mount Athos."

19. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece,* 145.

20. Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 145; Deacon, *Vice-Admiral T. A. B. Spratt,* 2–3.

21. Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 145.

22. On Letronne, see Godlewska, *Geography Unbound,* 282. On Rudaire, see Heffernan, "Bringing the Desert to Bloom," 97–98.

23. Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 146.

24. Ibid., 147–49.

25. Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries,* 145.

26. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece,* 117–18; 140–41.

27. "Oh Sane, alas, great was my sorrow that so much of antiquity had perished!" (ibid., 148, my translation); Marsden, *Memoir of the Life of William Martin Leake,* 23.

28. Bowen, *Mount Athos, Thessaly, and Epirus,* 47. On the University of Corfu, see Hyman, *Edward Lear in the Levant,* 20.

29. Bowen, *Mount Athos, Thessaly, and Epirus,* 53, 64.

30. Ibid., 103, 118, 83. The Homeric quote is from *Odyssey,* 15.74.118. Bowen's statement about the continuity between the ancient and modern Greek language seems largely rhetorical. Modern Greeks would have hardly understood a British man speaking the Greek of Xenophon. A story of philhellene dismay at the unbridgeable gulf between "what it was that the Greeks had been, and what it was that they are no longer" is recounted by Virginia Woolf in her account of her visit to Mount Pentelikon in 1906, during which her companions addressed local peasants "in their own language as Plato would have spoken it had Plato learned Greek at Harrow." Devastatingly misunderstood, they anathematized "the dusky garrulous race. . . who had parodied the speech and pilfered the name of the great. . . . To denounce them thus was not only to discharge a duty on behalf of the dead but to declare the rightful inheritors" (quoted in Lowenthal, "Classical Antiquities as National and Global Heritage," 732).

31. Urquhart, *The Spirit of the East,* 189. "Stesicrates" is the name Plutarch used for Dinocrates. Nineteenth-century philhellenes likened Greek mountains to classical sculptures (see, for example, J. A. Symonds [1874] in Lowenthal, "Classical Antiquities as National and Global Heritage," 731).

32. Simōpoulos, *Xénoi taxidiōtes stēn Elláda,* 14; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture,* 196. See also Lowenthal, "Classical Antiquities as National and Global Heritage," 726.

33. Langlois, *Géographie de Ptolémée,* 97.

34. The monks were aware of the importance of the manuscripts and generally prevented pillaging. Today Athos's libraries host sixteen thousand Byzantine and modern Greek manuscripts, as well as a considerable number of chrysobulls, patriarchal letters, and other treasures. On Athos's libraries, see Litsas, "Palaeographical Researches in the Lavra of Mount Athos"; and Jeffreys, "The Libraries of Mount Athos."

35. Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods,* 84; Simōpoulos, *Xénoi taxidiōtes stēn Elláda,* 33.

36. Villoison quoted in Lavagnini, *Villoison in Grecia,* 72; de Vogüé, *Syrie, Palestine, Mont Athos,* 35; Bisani, *Lettres sur divers endroits de l'Europe, de l'Asie, et de l'Afrique,* 56–57.

37. Stoneman, *Travelers to an Antique Land,* 171.

38. Hunt, "Mount Athos," 200.

39. Ibid., 198.

40. Cormack, "A Gentleman's Book," 145–48; Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East.*

41. Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East,* 309.

42. Ibid., 342.

43. Cormack, "A Gentleman's Book," 154; Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East,* 319, 369. On the Victorian taste for the Gothic, see MacKenzie, "Queen Victoria and the Reinvention of Chivalry," 16.

44. Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East,* 387.

45. Ibid., 325.

46. Cormack, "A Gentleman's Book," 155; Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East,* xv, xiii; Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque,* xiii. *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* was subsequently published as *Ancient Monasteries of the East.*

47. Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East,* 324.

48. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque,* xi, 10, 15; Price quoted ibid., 17.

49. Hunt, "Mount Athos," 203, 212.

50. Tozer, "The Monks of Athos," 91; Davenport, *Mountains and Mountain Climbing,* 181; Riley, *Athos, or the Mountain of the Monks,* 6. Athlestan Riley was a prominent champion of Anglicanism active in the Levant. Riley laid the foundation of the archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to the Assyrian Christians and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a member of the London Diocesan Conference, a member of the House of Laymen of the province of Canterbury, and the honorary treasurer of the Church Education and Voluntary Schools Defence Union for the Metropolis (Gothóni, *Tales and Truth,* 107).

51. Curzon, *Ancient Monasteries of the East,* 303.

52. Cormack, "A Gentleman's Book," 148.

53. Peckham, "The Exoticism of the Familiar and the Familiarity of the Exotic," 170; Loukaki, "Whose Genius Loci?" 312; Cormack, "A Gentleman's Book," 158; Kalligas, "Twin Reflections of a Byzantine City," 24.

54. De Colange, *Picturesque Russia and Greece,* 132, 134; Reclus, *The Earth and Its Inhabitants,* 109.

55. On spontaneity and the picturesque, see Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque,* 4; and Peckham, "The Exoticism of the Familiar and the Familiarity of the Exotic," 172, emphasis in the original.

56. Said, *Orientalism,* 169.

57. Hamilton, *Here, There, and Everywhere;* de Vogüé, "The Neo-Christian Movement in France," 235, 237, 241.

58. de Vogüé, *Syrie, Palestine, Mont Athos,* 259, 291–92, 279.

59. Ibid., 270.

60. Morritt, *A Grand Tour,* 154.

61. Semple, *The Influences of Geographic Environment,* 1; Bowen, *Mount Athos, Thessaly, and Epirus,* 12–13, emphasis added.

62. Duncan, "The Struggle to Be Temperate," 440.

63. Bowen, *Mount Athos, Thessaly and Epirus,* 14–15.

64. Davenport, *Mountains and Mountain Climbing,* 185. See also Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey,* 68; and Riley, *Athos, or the Mountain of the Monks,* 57.

65. T. Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition," 220; de Colange, *Picturesque Russia and Greece,* 136; Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey,* 109. De Vogüé had himself commented on the 1889 Exposition of Paris in *Harper's.*

66. Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey,* 86.

67. Didron, "Le Mont Athos," 83; Reclus, *The Earth and Its Inhabitants,* 107–8; Grant, "The Sphinx in the North," 236; Bowen, *Mount Athos, Thessaly and Epirus,* 47.

68. James Harvey Robinson, ed. and trans., *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1970), 308–11. On the identification of Petrarch's ascent as a landmark episode in the history of modern vision and subjectivity, see Clark, *Landscape into Art;* Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory,* 50; and Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 421. For a critical reading, see John Wylie, "An Essay on Ascending Glastonbury Tor," *Geoforum* 33 (2002): 441–54.

69. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 458–59, 503; Kearns, "The Imperial Subject," 450.

70. Headley, *Mountain Adventures in Various Parts of the World,* 9; Ruskin quoted in Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 508. On mountains and the sublime, see Cronon's foreword to *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory,* by Marjorie Nicolson, xi; Marjorie Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory,* 309, 70–71; and Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry,* 3. Alpinism became a popular sport in Italy as well. The Italian statesman and financier Quintino Sella and others founded the Club Alpino Italiano in 1863.

71. Byron quoted in Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory,* 1, 338, 325; Headley, *Mountain Adventures in Various Parts of the World,* vii, 2; Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 488.

72. For a detailed description of Riley's ascent, see his *Athos,* 208–15. Information by contemporary climbers can be found at www.chalkidiki.com/athos/trekking_guide.html, for example.

73. St. Euthymius's miracle is narrated in chapter 36 of his vita (Petit, "Vie et office de St. Euthyme le Jeune," 201–2).

74. See chapter 9 of the vita of Maximos by Theophanes (Halkin, "Deux vies de s. Maxime le Kausokalybe," 77–79). On James's vision, see *Orthodox Life Magazine* 29, no. 6 (1979): 1–7. The liturgy celebrated by St. Euthymius the Georgian is narrated in Ioannikios's *Athonite Gerontikón,* 282–83. Athos's peak is also narrated by the monks as a place of temptation. The tradition that identifies Athos with Mount of Temptation finds echoes in local accounts of monks attacked by the "demon of arrogance and disobedience." According to a popular story reported in the *Ypotaktikón,* for example, Savvas, a young monk who lived in the Skētē of Saint Anna at the end of the nineteenth century, had heard from many about the summit of Athos, and he desired to make a pilgrimage himself. He kept hearing the phrase "old Athos" and truly believed that this referred to an actual elder who lived on the peak of the mountain. Despite his elder's opposition, Savvas secretly left and started to climb the mountain. When he reached a location called Hairi, he found on the road a venerable elder who declared himself to be "Old Athos." He told Sávvas that all the brave young monks who want to follow their own will come and venerate him, and ordered Savvas to do the same. As soon as the monk made a prostration, he saw that the hand he had just kissed was covered by scales, and its fingers had horrible nails. Savvas thus realized that he had been deceived and "venerable Elder Athos" was the devil (Palaiogiánnēs, *Ypotaktikón,* 302–9). Spyridon, another monk from Katounákia, fell victim to the same temptation. Completely blinded by arrogance, one night he saw what appeared to be an angel, although in reality it was the devil. This praised the monk and told him to go to the summit of Athos, where God wanted to reward him. After a hike of many hours, Spyridon reached the summit and saw a red sphere, in which Christ appeared sitting in the center, surrounded by angels, apostles, and hierarchs and saints. As soon as he crossed himself, "all the illusions disappeared, and Spyridon found himself alone at the very edge of a chasm in a steep ravine, with one leg in deep snow and the other ready to step forward into the abyss" (Ioannikios, *An Athonite Gerontikón,* 321).

75. An early-twentieth-century example of personal retreat on the summit is that of the monk Serapios, who spent three days and three nights there but, unable to endure the cold, left the peak and sought his *hēsychía* elsewhere. His story is narrated in Ioannikios, *An Athonite Gerontikón,* 218.

76. Hunt, "Mount Athos," 204; Bowen, *Mount Athos, Thessaly and Epirus,* 97.

77. Morritt, *A Grand Tour,* 150, 152; Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa,* 164–65.

78. Holland, *Travels in the Ionian Isles, Albania, Thessaly, Macedonia, etc.,* 74.

79. Llewellyn Smith, "Perceptions of the Holy Mountain," 4; Marjorie Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory,* 11.

80. Lord G. Byron, *The Monk of Athos.*

81. Riley, *Athos, or the Mountain of the Monks,* 38; Tozer, "The Monks of Athos," 91.

82. Urquhart, *The Spirit of the East,* 178–79.

83. Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey,* 200–201.

84. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece,* 127.

85. Webber Smith, "Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 62, 68.

86. Ibid.; Smyth, *The Mediterranean, a Memoir Physical, Historical, and Nautical,* 65.

87. Webber Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 68.

88. Day, *The Admiralty Hydrographic Service,* 42, 44; Smyth, *The Mediterranean, a Memoir Physical, Historical, and Nautical,* vi.

89. Smyth, *The Mediterranean, a Memoir Physical, Historical, and Nautical,* 366. On the transformations of Athos's coastline through the centuries and further eighteenth-century examples, see Livierátos, "Athō perimétrou metamorfōseis."

90. Webber Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 66. On Copeland and the measurement of Greek mountains, see "A Sketch of the Progress of Geography and of the Labours of the Royal Geographical Society, during the Year 1836–7," 178; Smyth, *The Mediterranean, a Memoir Physical, Historical, and Nautical,* 405; and Ritchie, *The Admiralty Chart,* 171–88.

91. Copeland, *An Introduction,* iv, 5, 4, 3.

92. Webber Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 66, 69.

93. Hyman, *Edward Lear in the Levant,* 11; Lear, *Edward Lear in Greece,* 1–2.

94. Hyman, *Edward Lear in the Levant,* 10, 18–19.

95. Ibid., 15.

96. Lear quoted in Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson,* 33.

97. Lear, *Edward Lear in Greece,* 2.

98. Ibid., 21, 217–18.

99. On Lear's acquaintances, see Hyman, *Edward Lear in the Levant,* 20, 31; Lear quoted ibid., 152; Lear to Ann, August 21, 1856, in Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson.*

100. Lear to Fortescue, October 9, 1856. "Agios Oros" is a misspelling in the original text.

101. Lear to Ann, October 8, 1856, in Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson.*

102. Ibid.; Lear to Fortescue, October 9, 1856, in Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson.* On Lear's attitude toward Orthodoxy and Byzantium, see Llewellyn Smith, "Perceptions of the Holy Mountain," 68.

103. Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson,* 21; Lear to Ann, October 8, 1856, in Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson.*

104. Lear to Emily Tennyson, October 9, 1856, ibid.

105. Flint, *The Victorians and Visual Imagination,* 286.

106. Lear to Ann, October 8, 1856, in Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson.*

5. Geopolitical Athos

1. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy," 29, emphasis added; Mackinder, *The Scope of Geography and the Geographical Pivot of History,* 30. On technological changes in this period, see Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space.*

2. Kovacs, *The Untamed Balkans,* 32, 38.

3. Fennell, *The Russians on Athos,* 193, 221–25. On the diplomatic correspondence about Athos, see Gooch and Temperly, *British Documents on the Origins of the War,*

80–81, 184–85, 436–37, 893, 1067–68; Papastathis, "The Status of Mount Athos in Hellenic Public Law," 70.

4. Papastathis, "The Status of Mount Athos in Hellenic Public Law," 70. The first geographical delineation of the land boundary occurred in 942. The following year, the boundaries were fixed slightly east from the supposed site of Xerxes' Canal. They remained such until the twentieth century (see Sidērōpoulos, *Aghion Oros,* 40–41; and De Mendieta, *Mount Athos,* 143).

5. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics,* 15.

6. Ibid., 47; Agnew and Corbridge, *Mastering Space.*

7. De Mendieta, *Mount Athos,* 147.

8. Hasluck, *Athos and Its Monasteries,* 3. Hasluck's book was complete by 1912, but wishing to add a chapter on the changes brought by the Balkan Wars, the author delayed publication in order to revisit the monasteries. He was unable to realize his plans because of the outbreak of World War I and health problems. He died in 1920, and his wife took charge of the final revisions of the book, which was published in 1924 (Gothóni, *Tales and Truth,* 115). On Hasluck as an ethnographer, see Shankland, ed., *Archaeology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia.*

9. Hasluck, *Athos and Its Monasteries,* 4, 5, 81.

10. Jerningham, *Mount Athos,* 1, 2; Dwight, "The Hoary Monasteries of Mount Athos," 264, 249. Here the author refers to the ban on female domestic animals on the Holy Mountain.

11. On the *National Geographic* and American geographical imagination, see Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America,* 150; Gero and Root, "Public Presentations and Private Concerns"; and especially Lutz and Collins, *Reading "National Geographic."* On the masculine gaze and "self-othering," see, for example, MacClintock, *Imperial Leather;* and G. Rose, *Feminism and Geography.*

12. H. J. S., "Allied Commission's Visit to Mount Athos."

13. Hasluck, *Athos and Its Monasteries,* 82–83.

14. Peckham, *National Histories, Natural States,* 138.

15. Luke, *Cities and Men,* 8.

16. Ibid., 23.

17. Luke, *Anatolica,* 7, 15, 23, 18, 17.

18. Luke, *Cities and Men,* 28; "Monks of Athos, Relations with Greek Government," *Times,* June 24, 1927; Billetta, *Der Heilige Berg Athos,* 341. The French considered some of Athos's monasteries to be dangerous centers for "philo-German propaganda" and submarine fuelling ("Le Mont Athos occupé par des troupes allies," *Le Miroir,* February 4, 1917; "Perquisitions aux couvents du Mont Athos," *Le Miroir,* March 4, 1917). During their brief occupation of the peninsula, a number of Athonite monks suspected of philogermanism were exiled to Mytilínē. French troops left the peninsula in 1919, after the Allied victory in the Great War (see Gabriēl Dionysiátos, "Aghioreitikē istoría 55 etōn," 64).

19. Keates, introduction to *The 6,000 Beards of Athos,* ed. Brewster, 9; Morand, "Mount Athos and No Women," 22, 23.

20. Halliburton, *Seven League Boots,* 245, 246.

21. Ibid., 14, 17.

22. Ibid., 262, 260.

23. Brewster, ed., *The 6,000 Beards of Athos,* 52, 57, 60–61, 42.

24. Ibid., 92, 85.

25. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 208. See also Decker, "The Reception of Psychoanalysis in Germany," 590.

26. Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* 1–10. In a 1931 article, the link between Frazer's anthropology and psychoanalysis is made even more explicit. Frazer declared that the scope of what he called "mental anthropology" was "to trace that evolution of the human mind which has accompanied the evolution of the human body from the earliest times" (Frazer, "The Inductive and Deductive Methods in Science," 18). On the interest in survivals, see also Doyle's novel *The Lost World;* and Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea,* 409.

27. Stableford, "Origin of Man," 2.

28. Keller, "George Sylvester Viereck," 92.

29. Viereck and Eldridge, *My First Two Thousand Years,* 10–11, 15. Among late-nineteenth-century French psychologists, the phenomenon of the "wandering Jew" merely typified "Jewish neurosis," the "irresistible need to move around, to travel without being able to settle anywhere" (Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth,* 285). J. M. Charchot (1825–93) commissioned one of his assistants to carry out a systematic study of the "wandering Jew." Psychoanalysis converged with anthropogeographical associations of the Jew with nomadic life and desert as opposed to the "true Germans" and their moist forests, providing twentieth-century racial theories with a solid "scientific" foundation.

30. Viereck and Eldridge, *My First Two Thousand Years,* 11. On Viereck and reactions to psychoanalysis in early-twentieth-century Germany, see Johnson, "George Sylvester Viereck," 4; and Decker, "The Reception of Psychoanalysis in Germany," 594.

31. Cullerre, *Magnétisme et hypnotisme,* 37.

32. Viereck and Eldridge, *My First Two Thousand Years,* 11.

33. Ibid., 10.

34. Ibid., 9.

35. Ibid., 11–12. The Eleusinian Mysteries were a famous ancient Greek cultic ritual.

36. See Ludovic and Balcarres, foreword to *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice,* ed. Robertson and Henderson.

37. R. Byron and Talbot Rice, *The Birth of Western Painting,* 1.

38. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition,* 230; Pyne, "Methodologies for Geology," 420. Dacosta Kaufmann interpreted the work of early-twentieth-century art historians such as Strzygowski in terms of diffusion across space and time (Dacosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art,* 187–93).

39. R. Byron, *The Station Athos,* 54; Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea,* 409; Talbot Rice, "The Monasteries of Athos," 443.

40. Talbot Rice, "The Monasteries of Athos," 443.

41. Talbot Rice, introduction to *The Road to Oxiana,* by R. Byron, vi. On Byron's criticism toward the "paper Philhellenes," see Robertson, "David Talbot Rice as Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art," vii; and R. Byron, *The Byzantine Achievement,* 18.

42. Mackridge, "R. M. Dawkins and Byzantium," 192.

43. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos,* 43.

44. Ibid., 29, 30, 187. In a lecture delivered in 1934, Talbot Rice argued that "the modern age makes possible the experience of delight to a degree never possible before—travel, photographs, books, knowledge. *Take advantage of it*" (Robertson, "David Talbot Rice as Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art," ix, emphasis in the original).

45. R. Byron, *The Byzantine Achievement,* 6, 32.

46. Talbot Rice, introduction to *The Road to Oxiana,* by R. Byron, viii.

47. R. Byron, *The Station Athos,* 33. A self-conscious precedent of this connubium of Byzantine architecture and modernity can be found in Le Corbusier's early architectural pilgrimage to Mount Athos in 1911 and in his subsequent projects influenced by this visit (for example, the garden-city unit he designed in 1914 for Arnold Beck, in which 120 units were assembled in a way that produced private spaces for individual meditation even in the most communal structures; or in La Tourette, a late-1950s complex which incorporated many elements Le Corbusier first saw on Athos). It is on the Holy Mountain that Le Corbusier, then a young student, dreamed of becoming "an honorable builder." In the diary of his journey to Athos, he recorded: "As for me, pushed to action by the demanding conviction of a builder who dreams of uniting steel with concrete in strong rhythms . . . I felt quite strongly that the singular and noble task of the architect is to open the soul to poetic realms, by using materials with integrity . . . to arrange the volumes in such a way that spirit emanates from it" (quoted in Zaknic, "Le Corbusier's Epiphany on Mount Athos," 31).

48. Talbot Rice, introduction to *The Road to Oxiana,* by R. Byron, viii; Byron, *The Station Athos,* 19.

49. Byron, *The Station Athos,* 27, 28.

50. R. Byron, "The Freedom of the Skies," 298, 300.

51. Coyle, "Robert Byron," 16–17.

52. R. Byron, *The Station Athos,* 78, 156.

53. R. Byron, *The Byzantine Achievement,* xii; Byron, "The Liberal Education," 290. See also Coyle, "Robert Byron," 11–12.

54. Coyle, "Robert Byron," 18, 9.

55. Strzygowski, *Origin of Christian Church Art;* Strzygowski, *Aufgang des Nordens;* Wood, *The Vienna School Reader,* 23; Marchand, "The Rhetoric of Artefacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism," 110, 123.

56. Strzygowski, *Origin of Christian Church Art,* ix, emphasis added.

57. Ibid., 22; R. Byron, *The Byzantine Achievement,* 10; Strzygowski, *Aufgang des Nordens,* 24, 36. See also Dacosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art,* 70.

58. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 79; Wolschke-Bulmahn, "The Nationalization of Nature and the Naturalization of the German Nation," 193–95.

59. Strzygowski quoted in Marchand, "The Rhetoric of Artefacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism," 127. On the revival of northern alpine art in Germany, see Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 93, 118; and Weitzmann, "Byzantine Art and Scholarship in America," 395.

60. Strzygowski, *Influences in Indian Art,* 25.

61. Strzygowski, *Origin of Christian Church Art,* 4, emphasis added.

62. Strzygowski, *Byzantine Denkmäler,* v; Pfister, "Robert Byron and the Modernisation of Travel Writing," 475; Banse, *Germany Prepares for War,* 8, xix; Olster, "Byzantinism and Nazism in 1930s and 1940s German Scholarship."

63. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* 8; Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection,* 185; Clogg, *Greece 1940–1949,* 7.

64. Dölger could count on the help of his scientific assistant Dr. O. Treitinger and the photography specialist K. Kress from the Reichsleiter's Operative Unit. Reichshauptstellenleiter A. Deindl from Berlin was responsible for scientific information on the problem of the Eastern Church. He was assisted by Dr. M. Siōtēs from the University of Athens and E. Tsigritēs, the interpreter. Lieutenant von Ingram, leader of the Sonderkommando Griechenland of Reichlsleiter Rosenberg's Operative Unit, constituted a key figure in the logistic organization of the expedition. Ten animals had been carried along all the way from Thessalonica to secure the transportation of men and scientific equipment (Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 10; Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 38, 47–48). "Reichsleiter" was the highest rank in the German Leadership Corps.

65. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* 236–37. Deputized by Hitler in 1934 with responsibility for the spiritual and philosophical education of the NSDAP and all related organizations, Rosenberg invoked a world revolution lying in the "awakening of the racial types, not in Europe alone but on the whole planet." Such awakening was "the organic countermovement against the last chaotic remnants of liberal economic imperialism, whose object of exploitation has fallen into the snare of Bolshevik Marxism, in order to complete what democracy had begun, the extirpation of the racial and national consciousness" (Stein, "Individual Responsibility of Defendants," 3). Rosenberg envisaged Germany's potential Lebensraum in Europe and in "the East." When he was appointed head of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories after the invasion of the USSR, he received exceptionally valuable books from the libraries of the Tsar's castles south of Leningrad, including 10,000 volumes from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries from Tsarskoe Selo, 11,500 volumes from the library of the Pavlok Castle, and another 16,000 books from Gachina, plus 60,000 books taken from the Hebraica and Judaica collection of Kiev (Hartung, "The 'Sonderkommando Künsberg' Looting of Cultural Treasures in the USSR," 2).

66. Quoted in Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 49.

67. De Mendieta, *Mount Athos,* 143; Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 47, 50–51. Dölger made two trips to Athos in 1928 and 1930. Sponsored by the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, Dölger's prewar visits to the Holy Mountain presented a series of difficulties which only the German occupation and the support of the German army allowed him to overcome (Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 11). On the transfer of Greek artwork to Germany, see also Simōpoulos, *Ē leilasía kai katastrophē tōn Ellēnikōn archaiotátōn.* In his postwar self-defense, Max Merten, chief of the German Administrative Unit of Macedonia, claimed to have denied Sonderstab Rosenberg's access to Athos, causing the failure of the project. As Tsamēs observed, this explanation sounds rather improbable. Other unknown reasons were at play, maybe related to the shift of German attention to their problems in southeastern Europe after the capitulation of Italy (Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 52).

68. Olster, "Byzantinism and Nazism in 1930s and 1940s German Scholarship"; Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 88, 290; Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* 6–7.

69. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 12; Kobre, *Development of American Journalism,* 684–85.

70. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 278.

71. Ibid., 282.

72. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture,* 32, 34.

73. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* 159.

74. Quoted in Romanós, "Eisagōgē," 7; Veloúdēs, *O Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer,* 32; Fallmerayer, *Perí tēs katagōgēs tōn sēmerinōn Ellēnōn,* 33, 35, 73; Fallmerayer, *Publicistes modernes de l'Allemagne,* 145–46. At the time of his visit to Athos, Fallmerayer was a member of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences, though he spent most of his time traveling to the Levant. In 1848, he was appointed professor of history at Munich University, and became a member of the national congress at Frankfurt. There he joined the opposition party, and the following year he accompanied the rump-parliament to Stuttgart, a course of action which led to his expulsion from his professorate. During the winter of 1849–50, he was exiled in Switzerland, but the amnesty of April 1850 enabled him to return to Munich (LoveToKnow 1911 Online Encyclopaedia).

75. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 11; Dölger, "Die tausendjährige Mönchsrepublik," 130, 133, 136, 143, 148, 153. Dölger's insistence on Athos's Greek-ness derives from his understanding as a Byzantine historian as much as from historical circumstances. While Fallmerayer probably sensed the imminent ascent of Russian power on Athos, at the time of Dölger's visit, Russian monastic institutions had been in decline for more than twenty years, and the Slav population on the peninsula had dramatically dropped. No wonder that the German scholar emphasized the "superiority of Greek groups" and the "numeric supremacy" of their monasteries over the Slavic ones (Dölger, "Die tausendjährige Mönchsrepublik," 142). Dölger's anti-Slav description produces a picture diametrically opposed to that provided by Luke and other World War I British and French officers.

76. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 20, 21; Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* xi, 183; Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 54.

77. Clogg, *Greece 1940–1949,* 110–11. See also Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* 80.

78. Clogg, *Greece 1940–1949,* 115. Agathangelos's manuscript was purportedly written in Sicily in 1279, but in fact it was an eighteenth-century forgery (Clogg, *Greece 1940–1949,* 116n; see also Brewster, ed., *The 6,000 Beards of Athos,* 80).

79. Doíkos, "O Agathággelos ōs prophētikón apokalyptikón érgon kai to mēnyma tou," 122, 126.

80. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 21.

81. Ibid., 11, 12. As a sign of gratitude at the end of the expedition, Dölger donated his ten beasts of burden to the Holy Community, asking that they be divided among the monasteries in need (Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 51n).

82. Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros* 23–25.

83. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 290; H. J. S., "Allied Commission's Visit to Mount Athos"; Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 290. Another Hitler icon was promised to the Holy Community as a gift by Major Stenger, commander of the German Garrison Headquarters of Lagadá (see Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 30).

84. Dölger, *Mönchsland Athos,* 290.

85. Clogg, *Greece 1940–1949,* 7; Loch, *Athos,* 225; Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece,* 85; Seligman, *War in the Islands;* Howell, *Escape to Live,* 201.

86. Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria,* 189, 315.

87. Loch, *Athos,* 226. On the rumors on the submarine fuelling at Vatopedi, see Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 41.

88. Quoted in Tsamēs, *Aghion Oros,* 38, 39.

89. Ibid., 41. On villages burnt by the Wehrmacht, see Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece.* On the monks' help to Allied refugees, see Gabriēl Dionysiátos, *Apó ton kēpo tou pappoú,* 11; Ioannikios, *An Athonite Gerontikón,* 20.

90. Howell, *Escape to Live,* 204.

91. Gabriēl Dionysiátos, *Anamnēseis kai nostalghíes,* 104.

92. Thomas, *Dare to Be Free,* 141.

93. Gabriēl Dionysiátos, *Anamnēseis kai nostalghíes,* 105.

94. Thomas, *Dare to Be Free,* 169.

95. Gabriēl Dionysiátos, *Anamnēseis kai nostalghíes,* 106.

96. Thomas, *Dare to Be Free,* 167–68.

97. Ibid., 143.

98. Gabriēl Dionysiátos, *Apó ton kēpo tou pappoú,* 124. On Greece's "mutilated body politic," see Peckham, *National Histories, Natural States.* Note the mix between war technology and poetic surge. Just as the airman's vision provides Thomas with an effective rendering of the view from his ideal fairy castle, so metaphors from wireless communications are employed by Elder Gabriel to describe the symbolic and spiritual role of Athos in his Venizelist vision.

6. Scientific Athos

1. On mountains as "islands on the land," see Strid, *Mountain Flora of Greece,* xv. Introducing *Geographical Review*'s special issue on mountains, Friend speculates on different reasons for the special academic interest in mountain people and environments. Besides mountains' microgeographies, he also mentions, for example, comparative studies of mountain societies on a global scale underpinned by the belief in the similarity of traits of these communities (Friend, *Mountain Geography in 2002*); see also Cosgrove and della Dora's introduction to *High Places.* On Forster and Table Mountain, see R. Grove, *Green Imperialism,* 325.

2. Hyde, "The Development of the Appreciation of Mountain Scenery in Modern Times," 113, 116; Buxton, "Imaginary Greek Mountains," 5; Simōpoulos, *Xénoi taxidiōtes stēn Elláda,* 28.

3. Dáphēs, *To physikón kállos tou Aghíou Orous,* n.p.; Diamantēs, "Physē kai perivállon sto Aghion Oros," 115.

4. Rackham, "Our Lady's Garden," 50; Dáphis, "Anthrōpines drastēriotētes kai physikó perivállon"; Sidērōpoulos, *Aghion Oros,* 28; Vavalōnas, "Chlōrída kai endemismós tou Aghíou Orous," 119; Larchet, "La funzione profetica del monachesimo atonita," 10; Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 537. Rackham has shown how today, as a consequence of the early-twentieth-century decline of the monasteries (and cultivations), Athos has become forested to an unprecedented extent.

5. Talbot, "Byzantine Monastic Horticulture," 55–56; W. B. Thomas, *Dare to Be Free,* 145; Ganiátsas, *Ē vlastēsis kai ē chlōris tēs chersonēsou tou Aghíou Orous,* 515. The *Geōponiká,* an agricultural and horticultural encyclopaedia presenting an accumulated practical lore of the ancients, is the work most representative of this tradition (see Rodgers, "Kēpopoiia").

6. On the role of place in the construction of scientific knowledge, see Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place.* On islands as places for scientific (especially botanical) experimentation, see *Green Imperialism,* 13–14.

7. Mandeville quoted in Lavenson, *Circa 1492,* 225.

8. Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge,* 81.

9. Belon, "A Description of Mount Athos, Commonly Called Monte Santo," 11. On Belon and pre-Linnaean taxonomy, see Huppert, "Divination and Erudition," 201.

10. Belon, *Voyage au Levant,* 150. On the figure of the insulist, see Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World,* 26.

11. Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 146. Hawkins played a major role in getting Sibthorp's work published. He remained in correspondence with W. M. Leake about the latter's efforts to create a map of Greece.

12. Ibid., 141, 146, 147; Withers, "Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," 138. Unlike Belon and most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century apothecaries, Sibthorp's and Hawkins's explorations of the Levant were not financed by monarchs or governmental institutions. Hawkins traveled for leisure and personal cultural enrichment and was self-financed. Sibthorp was supported by a prestigious fellowship obtained from Oxford University, through which he paid Bauer as his personal assistant and illustrator (Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* viii, 19).

13. Sibthorp, "Second Voyage in the Graecian Sea," 54. The frontispiece of volume 2 was drawn by Bauer, whereas that of volume 8 was probably prepared by Imrie (see Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 211).

14. Withers, "Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," 142; Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 200. Posthumously published in 1806, the *Prodromus* was the other great Sibthorpian work. Like the *Flora,* it was edited by James Edward Smith, a young botanist and well-trained classicist, who at the age of twenty-seven purchased Linnaeus's collection, gaining full membership in the Royal Society.

15. Bruce, "John Sibthorp," 353. On antiquarian taxonomy, see Vlahakis, "Sir James Smith and the Introduction of Botany in Greece," 94.

16. Withers, "Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," 159; Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 76, 80.

17. The "superstition of the caloyers" here refers to the ban on grazing animals (see chap. 2, n. 6). Imrie, *A Catalogue of Specimens Illustrative of the Geology of Greece,* 6; Sibthorp quoted in Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 157–58; Sibthorp, "Second Voyage in the Grecian Sea," 39, 66.

18. Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 101, 108–9, 179; Miller, "Joseph Banks, Empire, and 'Centers of Calculation' in Late Hannoverian London," 24.

19. Sibthorp, "Second Voyage in the Graecian Sea," 40; Withers, "Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," 154. According to Rackham, twenty of Athos's twenty-eight endemics are limited to the "rock-garden" of the alpine zone (Rackham, "Our Lady's Garden," 54).

20. Imrie, *A Catalogue of Specimens Illustrative of the Geology of Greece,* 11; Withers, "Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," 143.

21. Lack, *The Flora Graeca Story,* 85.

22. Ibid., 116, 218. On the museum of the University of Edinburgh, see Withers, "Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," 155.

23. Malcolm Nicolson, "Humboldtian Plant Geography after Humboldt"; Grisebach, *Reise durch Rumelien,* 331; Humboldt, *Cosmos,* 1:55.

24. Humboldt quoted in Godlewska, *Geography Unbound,* 238, and in Malcolm Nicolson, "Humboldtian Plant Geography after Humboldt," 289.

25. Dettelbach, "Global Physics and Aesthetic Empire," 261, 258.

26. Malcolm Nicolson, "Humboldtian Plant Geography after Humboldt," 297. The figure and the work of Alexander Humboldt exerted a critical influence on Grisebach's scholarship. From 1832 to 1834, Grisebach studied at Göttingen, where Humboldt himself had studied. When Grisebach later moved to Berlin, he got acquainted with Kunth, one of Humboldt's closest collaborators. *Privatdozent* and later (in 1847) professor at the University of Göttingen, Grisebach eventually developed a personal friendship with Humboldt himself, and the two maintained a copious scientific correspondence. Grisebach's Humboldtian legacy was best expressed in the chapter on Humboldt's plant geography, which the Göttingen professor was asked to write for Bruhns's commemorative scientific biography (see Grisebach, "Pflanzengeographie und Botanik"; Grisebach, "Botanical Geography," 127; and Raup, "Trends in the Development of Geographic Botany," 324). The Italian plagiarized rendering of Grisebach's work is Ardissone's *La vegetazione terrestre considerata nei suoi rapporti col clima;* an account of this plagiarism scandal is given in *Corriere della Sera di Milano,* August 6–7, 1885.

27. Humboldt, *Cosmos,* 1:8; see also ibid., 2:94.

28. Grisebach, *Reise durch Rumelien,* v.

29. Humboldt quoted in Dettelbach, "Global Physics and Aesthetic Empire," 268. Examples of the poeticization of newly discovered islands are Thaiti, named by Bougainville "La Nouvelle Cythère," and Mauritius, compared by the physiocrat Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to the island of Samos (R. Grove, *Green Imperialism,* 237, 249).

30. Grisebach, *Reise durch Rumelien,* 260, 245.

31. Ibid., 245; Dettelbach, "Global Physics and Aesthetic Empire," 268, 287; Humboldt, *Cosmos,* 1:xvi, 8.

32. Humboldt, *Cosmos,* 1:33.

33. Grisebach, *Reise durch Rumelien,* 228.

34. Ibid., 269, 302; Grisebach, *La végétation du globe d'après sa disposition suivant les climats esquisse d'une géographie comparée des plantes,* 482. In Grisebach's travel account, the Parisian foot is employed as the unit of measure.

35. Humboldt quoted in Bunkse, "Humboldt and Aesthetic Tradition in Geography," 145.

36. Grisebach, *Reise durch Rumelien,* 314–15.

37. Humboldt quoted in Bunkse, "Humboldt and Aesthetic Tradition in Geography," 146.

38. Grisebach, *La végétation du globe d'après sa disposition suivant les climats esquisse d'une géographie comparée des plantes,* xiii.

39. Ibid., 323, 329.

40. Ganiátsas, *Ē vlástēsis kai ē chlōris tēs chersonēsou tou Aghíou Orous,* 525; Rauh, *Klimatologie und Vegetationsverhältnisse der Athos-Halbinsel,* 57; Humboldt, *Cosmos,* 1:29, emphasis added.

41. Ogilvie, "A Contribution to the Geography of Macedonia," 10, 12, 14; A. T. Grove and Rackham, *The Nature of Mediterranean Europe,* 8–9. While most scholars have usually traced the general aridisation of the Mediterranean to the decline of the Roman Empire, Grove and Rackham date it back to the fourth millennium BC. Their hypothesis, however, is still very much debated (see Lowenthal, "Mediterranean Heritage," 374).

42. Turrill, "A Contribution to the Botany of Athos Peninsula," 207. On the various bans on animals, see chap. 2, n. 6, in this volume.

43. Turrill, *The Plant Life of the Balkan Peninsula,* xiii. On Pallis, see Cameron and Matless, "Benign Ecology," 253, 260. Rackham has recently shown the limits of this theory and revisited "floristic Athos" in terms of a cultural landscape, product of the interaction between monks and the environment, rather than "a prelapsarian paradise withdrawn from the corrupting effects of human activities" (Rackham, "Our Lady's Garden," 55).

44. Turrill and Summerhayes, "Ecology and Taxonomy," 424, 427; Golley, *A History of the Ecosystem Concept in Ecology,* 8; Turrill, "Some Problems of Plant Range and Distribution," 206; Turrill, *The Plant Life of the Balkan Peninsula,* 213.

45. Tansley, "Editor's Preface," viii.

46. Turrill, "Some Problems of Plant Range and Distribution," 206; Turrill, *The Plant Life of the Balkan Peninsula,* 5. On the exchange of metaphors between geopolitics and ecology, see also Cameron and Matless, "Benign Ecology," 261. That such a cosmopolitan mix depended on the geographical location and undefined form of the Balkan Peninsula was a driving argument also among European and American geopoliticians of the time (see, for example, Kovacs, *The Untamed Balkans*).

47. Turrill, "A Contribution to the Botany of Athos' Peninsula," 208, 328; Hill, "A Botanist on the Holy Mountain," *Blackwood's Magazine,* July 1934, 82.

48. Turrill, "Some Problems of Plant Range and Distribution," 202, 215, 217–18; Vale, "From Clements and Davis to Gould and Botkin," 16; Hill, "A Botanist on the Holy Mountain," *Blackwood's Magazine,* July 1934, 81, 83; *Journal of the Kew Guild,* 1942, 138. For another idyllic description of "scientific Athos," see Schacht, "A Botanical Excursion to the Athonite Peninsula."

49. Hill, "A Botanist on the Holy Mountain," *Blackwood's Magazine,* November 1934, 649.

50. Ibid., 651.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 649, 650; Turrill, *Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew,* 48.

53. Hill, "A Botanist on the Holy Mountain," *Blackwood's Magazine,* November 1934, 650.

54. Ibid., 82; Turrill, *Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew,* 51; Turrill, "A Contribution to the Botany of Athos Peninsula," 204–6. During his visits to Athos, Dawkins collected a number of species which he then took to Kew for identification and donated to the collections. Some of the plants he gathered are mentioned in his *The Monks of Athos,* 35.

55. Completed in 1934 as a doctoral dissertation, Choukas's sociological study was published the same year under the auspices of his advisor, Prof. Robert Morrison MacIver. The original dissertation title was "Mount Athos: A Sociological Study of a Theocratic Republic."

56. On the origins of American sociology, see Coser, "American Trends." On early-twentieth-century American sociology, see Moore, "Functionalism," 335.

57. Chapoulie, "Using the History of the Chicago Tradition of Sociology for Empirical Research," 158. The 1930s saw an increasing interaction between sociologists and anthropologists and the consolidation of a distinctively American pragmatism, of an empirical descriptiveness that was lacking in the European tradition. The empirical turn of the 1920s and 1930s continued to rest on Durkheim's conceptualization of the sociological method as scientific practice. At the same time, however, it challenged the French tradition by emphasizing the importance of being situated in the field (see Platt, *A History of Sociological Research Methods in America 1920–1960,* 2).

58. Choukas, *Black Angels of Athos,* xi, 45.

59. Ibid., xii, 238.

60. MacIver, foreword to *Black Angels of Athos,* by Choukas, vii, emphasis added.

61. Choukas, "The Concept of the Cultural Lag Re-examined," 758.

62. Choukas, *Black Angels of Athos,* xii.

63. Ibid., 233, 216, 6, 240, 197, 208, 4. Dating back to Saint Athanasius, the coenobitic form of organization (communal life and complete submission to an abbot) was considered by Choukas as "the guardian of traditional monasticism on Athos," which radiated "all the conservative forces that tend to preserve the status quo" (ibid., 116–20). Choukas envisioned idiorrhythmic monasteries as "more liberal" institutions serving as "points through which material inventions penetrate slowly into the community" (Choukas, *Black Angels of Athos,* 259). By the time of Choukas's visit, of the twenty monasteries nine had been turned into idiorrhythmic houses over the past centuries, generally after economic distress. Choukas envisioned this form of monasticism as the inevitable future of a more secularized and modern Athos. Religion, Choukas argued, generally worked together with the nationalistic factor, social maladjustment, persecution and oppression, the commission of crime, acquisition of religious prestige and political and economic power, etc. (ibid., 50–64).

64. Ibid., 49.

65. MacIver, foreword to *Black Angels of Athos,* by Choukas, 35, emphasis added. On truth and science, see Shapin, "Placing the View from Nowhere," 5.

66. Choukas, "The Concept of the Cultural Lag Re-examined," 760.

67. Choukas, *Black Angels of Athos,* 11, 230, 9–10, 13; McIver, foreword to *Black Angels of Athos,* by Choukas, vii. In 1933, one year before Choukas published *Black Angels,* the Greek novelist Themos Kornaros authored the scandal exposeé *The Holy Mountain: The Saints Unmasked,* in which he claimed to have disguised himself for eight months as a workman on Athos and accused the monks of all sorts of depravations and crimes.

68. Choukas, *Black Angels of Athos,* 11.

69. Ibid., 12–13.

70. Ibid., 203.

71. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture,* 29.

72. The first person plural is found in statements such as "what *we* want is not to believe, but to know . . . *we* want evidence *we* can see, hear, smell, or touch. . . . *The defenders* [that is, the monks] are unable to provide us with such evidence" (Choukas, *Black Angels of Athos,* 269–72, emphasis added).

73. Ibid.

74. Truxal, "Black Angels of Athos, Review," 266; Halliburton, *Seven League Boots,* 252; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture,* 127; R. Byron, "Black Angels of Athos, Review," 134.

75. Byron, "Black Angels of Athos, Review," 135.

76. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 194–96. For an example of restoration by the monks, see Lash, "Athos, a Working Community." Athonite *metóchia* can be found in different parts of Greece, as well as abroad. The Monastery of Simonópetra, for example, owns three of them in France.

77. Speake, *Mount Athos,* 194.

Epilogue

1. Konidaris, *The Mount Athos Avaton,* 23, 29; *Scotsman,* October 25, 2003. On the legal aspect of the *ávaton,* see also Kroustalákēs, "Ávaton Aghíou Orous," 791.

2. Konidaris, *The Mount Athos Avaton,* 18; Talbot, "Women and Mt Athos," 69.

3. Talbot, "Women and Mt Athos." On Dušan's visit to Mount Athos, see Trifunović,

Tsar Dushan o svom boravku na Svetoj Gori, Sa Svetogorskih izvora; and Milunović, "Sérvoi periēgētés sto Agion Oros."

4. Halliburton, *Seven League Boots,* 204–5.

5. Lear quoted in Hyman, *Edward Lear in the Levant,* 147.

6. Konidaris, *The Mount Athos Avaton,* 19; Halliburton, *Seven League Boots,* 204–5. Diplarakou's tale is narrated by Sack, *Report from Practically Nowhere,* 149.

7. Choisy, *A Month among the Men,* 120.

8. A dramatic testimony regarding the Communist guerrilla combatants' exploits on and around Athos and the *antartínes'* infringement of the *ávaton* is provided by Joice Nankivell Loch, *A Fringe of Blue,* 223. On the disembarkation of women in 1953, see Konidaris, *The Mount Athos Avaton,* 19.

9. Wharton, *The Cruise of the* Vanadis, 173.

10. Ibid., 174–75.

11. Ibid., 178–79.

12. *Revue Générale des Sciences Pures et Appliquées,* December 15, 1897, 929, emphasis added.

13. Other early-twentieth-century accounts by women who viewed Athos from their yachts can be found in Anderson, *A Yacht in the Mediterranean Seas;* and Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life.*

14. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 61.

15. Cresswell, *Place,* 10, 31; Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 174.

16. On islands as spaces of desire and knowledge making, see Gillis, *Islands of the Mind.*

17. Richardson, "Place: Experience and Symbol," 1.

18. Loch, *Athos,* 15.

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